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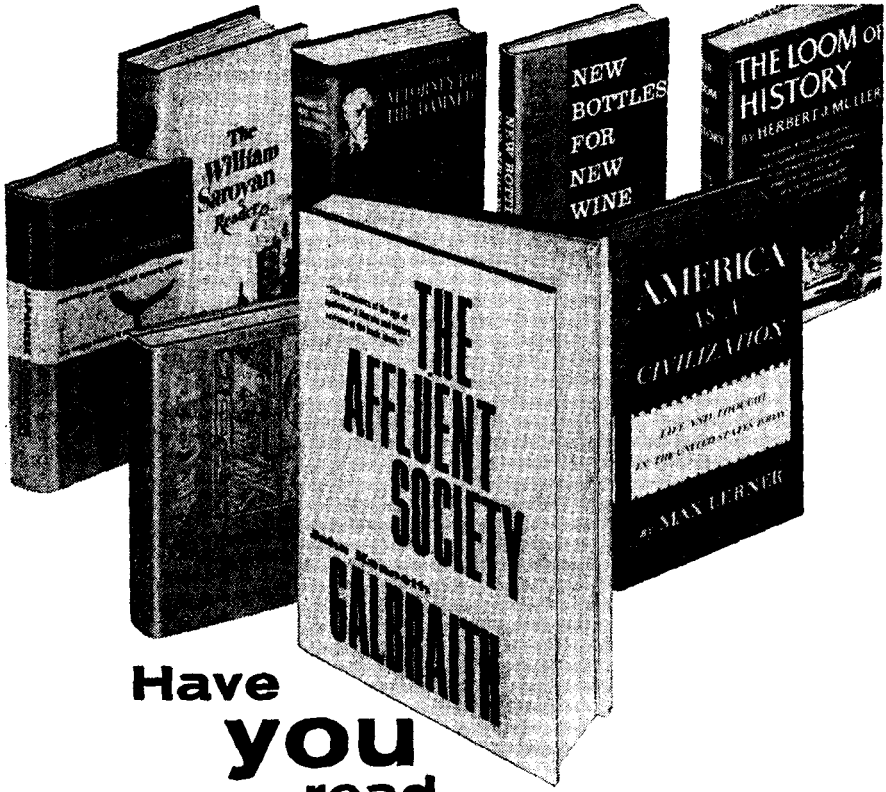

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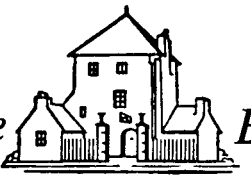
Random House  *Books*

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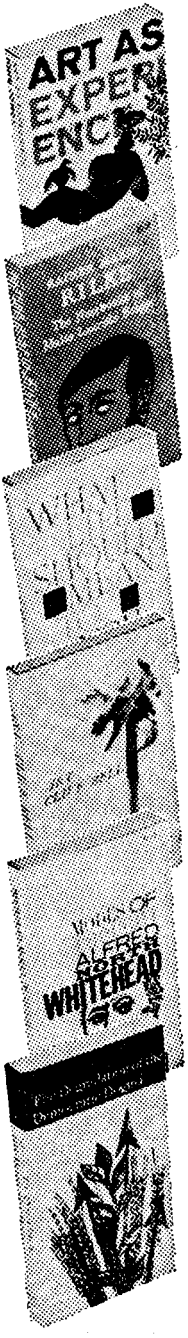

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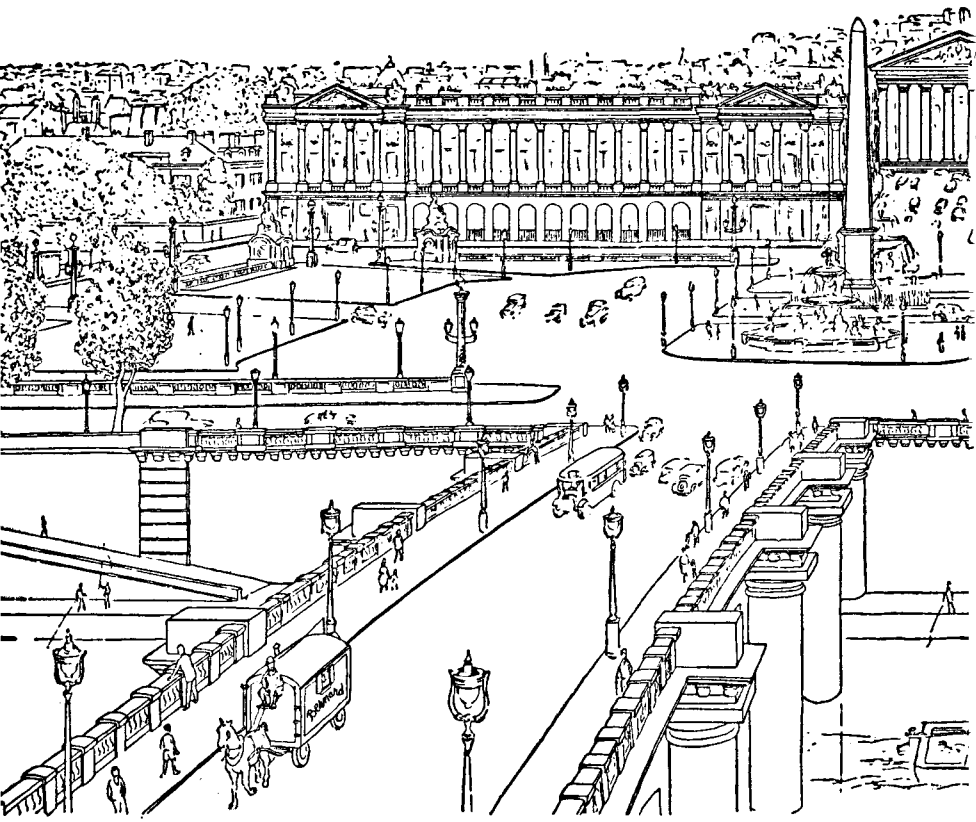

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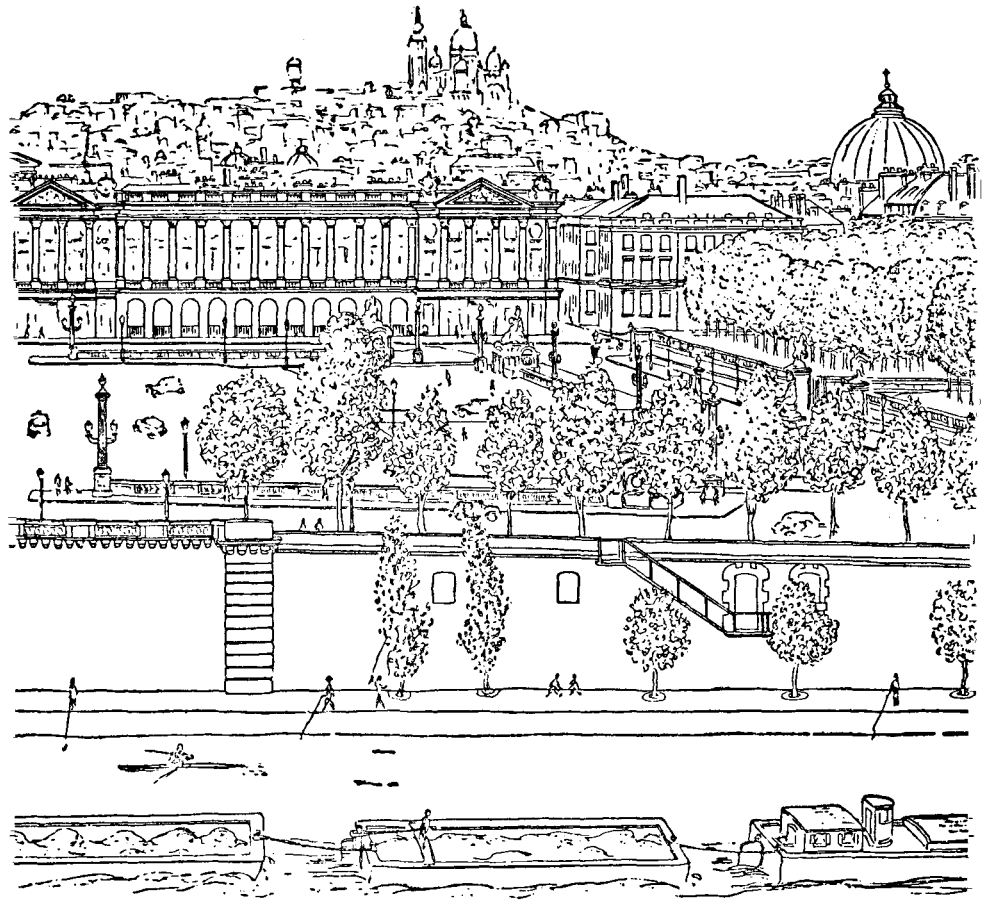

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NUMBER TWENTY

FICTION

William Butler *The Building* 13

Philip Roth *Good-bye Columbus* 71

INTERVIEW

James Jones *The Art of Fiction XXII* 34

PORTFOLIOS

Marc Chagall *5 Drawings* 28

Jean Hélion *7 Drawings* 58

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POETRY

Louis Simpson	*The Boarder*	**26**
Robert Bly	*The Sorb Is The Tree of Thor*	**26**
James Wright	*Old Man Drunk*	**27**
Edward Watkins	*Light Essay on a Serious Theme*	**56**
William Stafford	*Recoil*	**57**
Stephen Orgel	*Talking It Out*	**57**
Richard M. Elman	*Arbor Day*	**66**
Thomas Whitbread	*Glutton*	**66**
Allen Grossman	*Holy Ghost Hospital*	**67**
Ralph Pomeroy	*A Frog, Leaping*	**68**
Peter Levi S. J.	*In a Corner of Eden*	**68**
E. G. Burrows	*Icon*	**69**

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WILLIAM BUTLER

THE BUILDING

AT first Shige Yamahara and Hamuro Iguchi took only passing interest in the construction of the Kobe-Kansai Bank Building. They sometimes peered through apertures in the red fence surrounding the hollowed lot to watch the steam shovels and, later, a mighty pile driver, and they paused now and again before an artist's sketch of the building as it would appear finished. The sketch showed a conventional and not especially beautiful building and both Yamahara and Iguchi, who were students of Japanese history, insisted that they themselves could have designed a finer building with no more training than their historical studies gave them. Yet when its steel sinews began to rise above the red fence they found themselves taking an unexpectedly deep interest in the building's progress.

Just across the street from the site there was a small Western-style cafe with a façade of plate glass windows. Yamahara and Iguchi formed the habit of sitting before one of these windows and watching the workmen clambering about the steel girders—riveters and welders now and again brought into mysterious, almost other-worldly, focus by little lavender bursts of light.

They didn't speak much and when they did they weren't likely to speak of the building. They watched half-embarrassedly, feeling oddly alone in their absorption. Only one other person they saw displayed any interest in the construction, a blond foreigner who sat gazing from the cafe windows as often as they did themselves; but it was likely that he, a foreigner, merely visited the Western-style cafe in preference to visiting a Japanese cafe, and watched simply because the

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building was there to be seen. They on the other hand came to the cafe wholly because of the building—though they were unable to explain to themselves why it was important to them.

Once Yamahara grinningly suggested: "Maybe it's because it's a bank."

"Sure," Iguchi said. "That's what this street needs all right." At the next corner four banks stood impressively clustered together. "No, I'll tell you. It's because of its height."

"Twenty-four stories?" scoffed Yamahara. "In America they have buildings four times as high. In Moscow there's a—"

"That's what I mean," interrupted Iguchi. "It's not Japanese. That's why we're interested."

Yamahara shook his head.

"We're interested," said Iguchi, "because it's going to be the highest building in Japan. Because it's big. You see?" Yamahara didn't, or else he didn't show it. "It's like a touched-up photograph. We know it doesn't really look as we do but we have an idea we'd be better off if we looked like that, so we pretend we do. I mean, we pretend that big buildings are *us*. No look, I'm not saying I think this building is better than something more truly Japanese. I'm only saying that, deep inside us, we're *afraid* it is. So we're seeing it as a real reflection of ourselves because we're afraid it should be real. Only it isn't."

"I can't see it as a racial issue at all."

"You don't get it." Iguchi went back to watching the men upon the steel girders. Yamahara said nothing more, but he was stingingly annoyed with Iguchi's analysis; he thought that, even if Iguchi's analysis was correct, he didn't want to be interested in the building for such a reason.

But both he and Iguchi returned to the cafe daily, watching the long arms of steel rise above the city.

And when the building stood twenty-four stories high, its white marble dominating Marunouchi, both Yamahara and Iguchi experienced a strange depression. Neither spoke of his depression and each tried not to recognize it in the

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other, as if to see it in the other might mirror it in the self. They sat at the cafe as frequently as before, looking upon the new building with awkward glances, as though it were a woman who, loved privately by each, was not to be discussed.

A few weeks after the building's completion Iguchi met Yamahara at the cafe and brought with him a newspaper from the previous evening. He seated himself and spread the paper out and pointed to a small photograph of a man's face. "Did you see this?" he asked. "It's him."

Yamahara studied the face for a moment and then said uncomfortably, "Don't talk so loud."

"Don't you recognize him? What's the matter?"

"Sure I recognize him. He's right behind me." Yamahara spoke in an angry whisper and Iguchi leaned out to glance at the man seated one table behind his friend. The photograph was unmistakably of the blond foreigner they had seen so many times: a light-eyed and fair-haired man, with long deep lines in the cheeks which lengthened the almost square face.

"He's supposed to be arrested," Iguchi said tight-lipped.

"Why? What did he do?"

Iguchi nodded to the paper, shoving it towards Yamahara. Yamahara quickly scanned the article which described how the man, a German named Schimmer, had scaled the face of the new Kobe-Kansai Bank Building wearing upon his back a sign advertising a local sake house, only to meet at the top a contingent of policemen headed by two detectives.

"I don't know why," Iguchi said softly. "I don't know. But it actually makes me mad. Can you understand? It's as though they're afraid we'll do something better than them. If we build a building, some European has to come along and try to make it look small. Can you understand what I mean?"

"Sure. Only it's stupid." Yamahara's voice was nervous and he spoke still more softly than Iguchi. "He's just poor and far from home. He's poor, so some sake company offers him a few yen to risk his life and he takes it. It's just a stupid advertising stunt." And yet he too felt angry with the German

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and couldn't explain the anger to himself. It was as if the German had become more intimate with the building in one day than he and Iguchi had in twenty months.

"It makes me mad all the same," Iguchi said, scowling across Yamahara's shoulder at the German's blond head. "I mean, how would they take it in Germany if I were to go along and walk up the front of a brand new German building? It's rude and disrespectful."

"Don't talk like a child." Yamahara glanced uneasily through the window to the Kobe-Kansai Bank Building. "How could he climb it though? What would he hold on to?"

"Oh he'd use some kind of tools. Sure, he probably knocked hunks out of the stone."

Suddenly the German arose and turned on Yamahara and Iguchi, greeting them, "Good morning," and without waiting for an invitation he took his chair to their table and seated himself so that he faced the window. "It was impossible not to overhear your remarks," he nodded to the building, as if addressing it rather than the two young men. "There are some things you've really made me want to say, if you'll excuse me," his Japanese thick but quite clear.

Iguchi clamped his mouth shut and refused to look at the German.

"A difficult building," the German spoke to Yamahara. "I got out of your prison easily enough, you know. Merely a matter of Mr. Adenauer's representative acting in my behalf. Of course, I shall be obliged to leave your country shortly. I regret this. I've been here for five years, you see—though I must admit I had really planned to leave anyway."

He turned to Iguchi, speaking directly to him even though Iguchi kept his eyes hard upon the table. "I must tell you I used no tools. I use artifices of no sort. I've been tempted to upon one or two occasions and this was one of them. Your building is," he sought some right word and settled upon, "stingy. It doesn't help one much." He smiled across the street. "I've climbed higher buildings certainly, but never a more difficult one. Very very difficult." He licked his lips thought-

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fully. "But I didn't climb it for money. No." He lifted his brows and smiled at Yamahara. "Thirty-thousand yen, my friend. I lived for more than a year in America, in New York City, just before I came to your country. There, money has meaning. And there thirty-thousand yen is not yet a hundred dollars." He smiled stiffly. "I saw a fellow floating down the Sumida not so long ago. I must tell you of him. He lay upon some sort of raft and carried a sign advertising a beer. That fellow doubtless earned as much as I did and what did he have to do? He floated unenergetically down a peaceful river, laying supine in the afternoon sunshine. What a profession. No, I didn't climb your building for money." He had again turned to Iguchi.

"Let me tell you that I was going to leave Japan as much as three years ago. I was in Osaka then and a fresh wanderlust was just ripening in me. But then talk of raising the highest building in Japan was begun, something more inspiring than television towers, and this stopped me. As you must know if you've read this article thoroughly I've climbed several buildings, including much higher buildings than this in both Chicago and Detroit, in America. Climbing buildings, I think, is with me a vocation. I do it because it excites me.

"As for the advertising, I happened to mention to a friend over a year ago that I contemplated ascending the face of this building when it was finished, and my friend suggested I become a living advertising campaign for the company which employed him, a sake manufacturer. They need hardly worry about trouble. The more trouble I caused, the more publicity for them, you see. And then they could feign ignorance of the law. Thirty-thousand yen," he mused. "Well I decided to do it, you know, since after all I had no way at all of foreseeing what my situation might be by the time the building was ready to be climbed." He chuckled curtly, as if amused with himself. "For that matter it might have been used, that money, to pay for a decent Western funeral, or to ship my broken body back to Cologne." Iguchi still had not raised his eyes and the German glanced at Yamahara. Yamahara smiled unsurely. "Really," he put his hands flat upon the

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table, seeming about to push himself to his feet, "I wished only to make you know that I had no intention of desecrating this building. It is a fine building."

Iguchi looked up at last, eyeing the German narrowly. "You shouldn't have done it. It cheapened the building."

"How stupid," said the German, twisting his mouth.

"You really like to climb buildings?" Yamahara asked in amazement.

"Like to?" The German sat back and rubbed his forehead. "I don't know. In a way I suppose I must. I don't wish to appear romantic but there *is* something which impels one to do strange things. I am impelled to climb certain buildings. That's all. But wait," he smiled again, "if you think it's fun, then I should show you my feet today. I am able to walk only through the merciful intercession of Japanese bandaging and German will. I never wear shoes during an ascent, you see. Only a few pairs of heavy stockings. No stockings at all would be still better but even German skin is sensitive."

Iguchi's cheeks had suddenly flared red and he clenched his fists on the table. "Be quiet," he ordered the German. "You brag too loudly."

"Iguchi," Yamahara remonstrated awkwardly, glancing swiftly about the restaurant.

"German will!" Iguchi hit the table with his fist. "You had no right to put your feet all over the building. We didn't do it did we? And it was more our building than yours." The rationalization sounded at once absurd to Iguchi and his embarrassment made him only the more furious with the German. "Just what's so great about climbing a building? What makes that so heroic?"

"A child could do it," the German said with no indication of being perturbed. "You too. Assuming of course that you used the interior staircase. And didn't hurry."

"But you're a great man!" spat Iguchi, scowling.

The German averted his eyes and once more set his hands flatly upon the table. "Yes, well climbing such a building from the outside is devilish. It takes considerable practice and some courage and a terrible foolishness."

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"I could climb it," snapped Iguchi. "Yamahara," he flung a hand across the table, "he could climb it. You think only a European could climb it. Isn't that your idea?"

"Not me," Yamahara said quickly. "I didn't say I could climb it."

Iguchi stared almost hatefully at Yamahara. Then he looked at the German, less hatefully than coldly. "Will you make a bet with me?"

"About scaling the building?"

"I'll bet I'm able to climb it as fast as you did. How long did it take you?"

"Forget about time," said the German. "Where patience is a virtue, forget about time. And forget all about such a bet."

"You won't bet?"

The German made a guttural sound and eyed Iguchi disgustedly.

"You won't bet?" demanded Iguchi.

"Now," the German began with quiet contempt, "I have perhaps three-hundred-thousand yen to my name, no more than that. I could do no less than give it all to you if you should climb the building."

Yamahara took in his breath and Iguchi too sat back in silence. Perhaps, Yamahara thought, thirty-thousand yen was not much money in America or Europe, but it still meant quite a lot in Japan. *Three-hundred-thousand yen!*

Iguchi relaxed at last, but with a new and still colder face, a more resigned face, as though he'd taken the offer of the German to mean that the German saw no risk to himself in the wager.

"How will you then leave the country?" asked Iguchi.

"Oh they'll throw me on a ship won't they?" He shrugged irritably.

"And you're telling the truth?"

"The truth?"

"How do I know you have this three-hundred-thousand yen? And that you'll give it to me?"

The German pursed his lips and took out his wallet, in

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which he found notes for some fifty-thousand yen. He handed the notes to the dumbfounded Yamahara. "The rest of course is put away. Your friend may keep this as the best immediate security I can give." Once again he gave a jerky shrug. "Please understand that I'm not encouraging you. I could scarcely envy such imbecile bravado."

Iguchi sucked in his lips, studying the building across the street. His forehead felt feverish and the building seemed different than he'd ever seen it. It seemed incredibly huge to him, and incredibly resolute. It looked ugly.

Yamahara said, "Even to think about it is foolish," and Iguchi shot a sharp look at him. Yamahara sat staring dumbly from the German to Iguchi, the money resting loosely in his hand. Iguchi's eyes fell upon the money momentarily and Yamahara dropped it to the table. "I won't hold it," he said.

Iguchi snorted and then half-smiled at the German, as though the two of them now shared a private understanding. "I trust you."

"Why not?" the German remarked unconcernedly.

Iguchi felt himself growing hot again and he brought one leg up to undo his shoelace. The German promptly put his hand on Iguchi's knee, forcing the leg down; and he kept the hand on Iguchi's knee as he searched the young man's eyes.

"So then, if you're really thinking of doing this thing, let me give you my advice. The building fortunately has unbeveled indentures between its blocks; it will be less difficult to keep your grasp. But your toes and fingers must work together. As soon as your feet and hands don't work together, then your bet is lost. Do you understand this?"

Iguchi only stared, his face admitting neither emotion nor intellection.

"Do you understand?" repeated the German. "Now remember: when a man tries to climb a wall, he thinks only of boosting himself straight up. The most direct visual line he takes in order to conserve energy, you see." He squeezed Iguchi's knee it seemed angrily. "Wrong. Do this and you put an impossible weight upon your hands. The situation is irreparable. I can't emphasize this strongly enough: if you

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only once lose the benefit of your knees, you'll fall. Do you understand?"

Iguchi's face relaxed somewhat and he turned to look at the building.

"Your body," continued the German, "must always lie at a gentle angle. Not too much! But never straight. You'll find that between the stones themselves there is all the room you need. It is all a matter of balance. But you must work from left to right, and right to left, never straight up and down. When you reach the first ledge, then wait. Wait there, and if you have any idea at all that you might not make it to the next ledge—and this is five stories again further up—then you make your way to the nearest window, yes?" The German nodded. "This has happened to me on more than one occasion. And sometimes from simple fright. If you become frightened, it is useless to continue.

"And the most important thing of all is simply to have nothing else upon your mind, and relax. Don't wonder what progress you've made. Think of nothing but *up*. *Up* is the prize. And keep your body loose. Do you understand?"

Iguchi was still watching the building and when the German started to speak again, "You must," Iguchi turned on him and hissed, "*Be quiet!*" Then he became confused and snapped his leg up to undo his shoelace.

Yamahara muttered softly, "Don't be a fool. Iguchi, don't be a fool."

"Be quiet," Iguchi said shakily. His shoes were off and he stood up. "Three-hundred-thousand yen," he nearly choked between his closed teeth.

"Oh yes," smiled the German. "So much money."

Yamahara felt paralyzed. He wanted to jump up and strike Iguchi, not just stop him but beat him punishingly, but he sat still. He watched Iguchi lower his head and turn his back to the German, then walk across the cafe to its entrance. A man came into the cafe and stopped to look wonderingly at Iguchi's stockinged feet.

Soon they could see him cross through the street's traffic, to stand upon the pavement on the other side of the street

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and gaze up, his head thrown back, at the straight height of the building.

"But you know," the German began and Yamahara started, as though having forgotten the presence of the foreigner, "if he should succeed he will be only the second to have climbed such a building without the use of artifices." He shook his head. "That is a difficult building." Yamahara had stopped listening.

Iguchi was standing at the base of the building, feeling its marbled surface. Yamahara felt himself shudder, as though touching the smooth stone through Iguchi's fingers. For a moment Iguchi hesitated and Yamahara caught his breath and all at once pushed his chair back, as though only now thinking of rushing across the street to restrain Iguchi physically. But then Iguchi had taken hold of some mere line in the wall, pushing one leg against the white wall, seeming to feel his weight against the building. His fingers crawled to one side as his leg pushed carefully, his other foot creeping up against the marble. Yamahara sat rigid. Iguchi drew himself up and looked down. He was only a few feet off the ground and three people, two women and a child, had stopped to look at him questioningly.

"He shouldn't look down," the German commented quietly. "Not even so close to the ground."

Iguchi went through the entire process again, slowly and arduously, and found himself this time perhaps seven feet above the sidewalk. From the cafe he looked unsure of himself; he waited some moments before attempting to move one hand up over the other. The three watching him had become eight or nine before Iguchi repeated the action: he took himself from the left to the right, a barely diagonal line upon the face of the building, and the German whispered: "Good." The rise this time seemed slower and more cautious but at the same time easier; he appeared more confident once he was ten or twelve feet above the pavement. He seemed to find fresh muscles each time he leaned in a new direction.

In the crowd beneath Iguchi there were now two policemen who shouted something neither Yamahara nor the

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German could hear, but who appeared obviously to be ordering Iguchi to come down. Iguchi instead began to take himself up once more, easing himself back to the left; he seemed now to swing a little in his movement, as though relaxing even during the brief motions of lifting himself. This time he didn't pause at all, but pulled himself up again with the same swinging motion. To Yamahara, his tense eyes fastened upon Iguchi's body, it seemed as though there were nothing at all to hold Iguchi to the smooth building—and the fact that he was there at all gave him reason to hope.

Only at one point during his climb to the first of the building's narrow ledges did Iguchi appear to waver, and that was about three stories up, when he seemed at once unsure in which direction to lean and of which hand to raise. Yamahara had begun to mumble, "Name of Amida, Name of Amida," and the German had glanced at him expressionlessly. Iguchi had instantly recovered his balance and he kept moving up.

And when Iguchi at last achieved the first ledge, Yamahara sighed loudly and stood up and walked around the table to sit in Iguchi's vacated chair. Some people among the crowd in the street clapped their hands and shouted, as though encouraging Iguchi on.

"He should stop there I think," said the German.

Yamahara took a cigarette the German offered but didn't light it; he shifted himself about in his chair and held the cigarette tightly. He felt too giddy to sit still. When Iguchi reached for some invisible line above the first ledge Yamahara stood up again: "He's going up!" The German drew in at his cigarette, watching through squinted eyes as Iguchi labored up from the first ledge.

There were now people standing about the table, strangers, all watching Iguchi. At the other window of the restaurant there was a still larger group of people. Traffic in the street had stopped and from some distant point sirens wailed dismally. Policemen were directing people away from the area just below Iguchi and each window from the fifth to

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the seventh stories of the building, and a few still higher and lower, were populated with startled heads. Iguchi was about twenty feet above the first ledge when the German spoke:

"He's straightened his body. His knees can't work."

Yamahara glanced heatedly at the German and by the time he turned back to the building Iguchi had disappeared. The people in the street seemed to have rushed in upon the building. For a short and yet immeasurable time there seemed nothing, neither motion nor color. Everything had stopped. In a moment the German lifted the money from the table and packed it neatly into his wallet.

"Did he fall?" Yamahara asked thickly, leaning against the window and looking as though he meant to move away from it, and at the same time looking too sick to take a step in any direction. "He fell."

The German rose heavily and sighed. He looked past Yamahara at the building, his face turned up from the throng of excited people which clogged the street. He gazed at the top of the building. The white marble glared something like a mirror in the light of the late morning sun; only at the corners of the building did the sun reflect curiously in spots of a softer hue, suggestions of red-rust, like some tint borrowed from the setting sun.

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THE BOARDER

The time is after dinner. Cigarettes
Glow on the lawn;
Glasses begin to tinkle; T V sets
Have been turned on.

The moon is brimming like a glass of beer
Above the town,
And love keeps her appointments "Harry's here!"
"I'll be right down."

But the pale stranger in the furnished room
Lies on his back
Looking at paper roses, how they bloom,
Looking at paper roses, how they bloom,
And ceilings crack.

—LOUIS SIMPSON

THE SORB IS THE TREE OF THOR, WHO HUNG NINE DAYS WOUNDED

Out of the jetty slip the dark bark rides,
As I more leave, each day, the man-leafed tree,
Hearing the Norse tell how they sail the sea.
Each day I see the ropes between us cut,
"A ship, for safety, must have one plank sorb,"
As the Norse say, "The Hanged Man died on sorb."
I leave no man, but from all men I part,
Setting forth gently on the boiling water,
Not more alone, but less; as the Norse say,
"Thor died on sorb; the sorb is Thor's salvation!"

—ROBERT BLY

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OLD MAN DRUNK

He sits before me now, reptilian, cold,
Worn skeletal with sorrow for his child.
He would have lied to her, were he not old:
An old man's fumbling lips are not defiled
By the sweet lies of love. Yet one must be
Skillful to bring it off; that treachery
Whips back to lash the bungler of its art.
He curses his ineptitude of heart.

He knows the quivering eye of youth is blind.
The pale ears, roaring deep as shell, are deaf
To the half-drowning cry of love behind
The skull. His daughter struck him in her grief
Across the face, hearing her lover dead.
He stood behind her chair, he bowed his head,
Knowing that even death cannot prolong.
The quick hysteric angers of the young.

I can say nothing, I will see him sit
Under the vacant clock, till I grow old.
The barkeep's wife returns to throw her fit
And pitch us out into the early cold.
I touch his shoulder, but he does not move,
Lost in the blind bewilderment of love,
The meaningless despair that could not keep
His daughter long from falling off to sleep.

Meanwhile, the many faces of old age
Flutter before me in the tavern haze.
He cannot let me see him weep and rage
Into his wrinkled pillow. Face by face,
He grins to entertain, he fills my glass,
Cold to the gestures of my vague *alas*,
Gay as a futile god who cannot die
Till daylight when the barkeep says goodbye.

—JAMES WRIGHT

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Chagall

MARC CHAGALL was born at Vitebsk, in Russia, on the 7th of July, 1887. He came from a Jewish family of very simple origin. Though he has since travelled all over the world, known people of every imaginable kind and achieved a rare degree of fame and honor, he has nevertheless remained at heart deeply attached to the place of his birth and the qualities of mind and spirit which it instilled in him. More then any other painter of our time he is bound to the human elements of love and contemplation expressed in strikingly original plastic terms. In 1910, after having studied at the Imperial School in St. Petersburg, he was sent to Paris by a patron of the arts. There he quickly became acquainted with the avant-garde of artists and connoisseurs: Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Modigliani and others. For a time he submitted to the influence of Cubism but adapted it, of course, to the particular demands of his very personal self-expression and never indulged in the pure, or synthetic, Cubism of Braque or Picasso. In 1914 he returned to Russia and when the Revolution broke out he was made a Commissar of Fine Arts. After a few years, however, the artistic aridity of the Communist regime became so oppressive that he returned to Paris. There, his talent quickly attained that maturity which has since made the work of Marc Chagall admired throughout the world not only by connoisseurs but also by those who hope to see in a work of art something of their most cherished reveries, aspirations and loves.

Unlike that of most of his contemporaries, Chagall's art is spontaneous and intuitive. "I am a moon rider bound to another paradise, not a statistician," he says. The word another *here seems particularly significant. He leaves his admirers free to think and feel as they please, and it is precisely their pleasure, in the amplest sense of the word, which concerns him. Asked a question about the purposes of his work, and its genesis, he answered, "I do not choose; life itself chooses for me the most natural technique." And indeed one finds in the works of Marc Chagall something profoundly natural, an immediacy of response to life in all of its manifestations and forms, a love, in short, of the beauties and truths of the world which the world may well—and does—appreciate. "The essential reason of our life on earth," he has said, "is like the joy of a plant and its natural growth."*

James Lord

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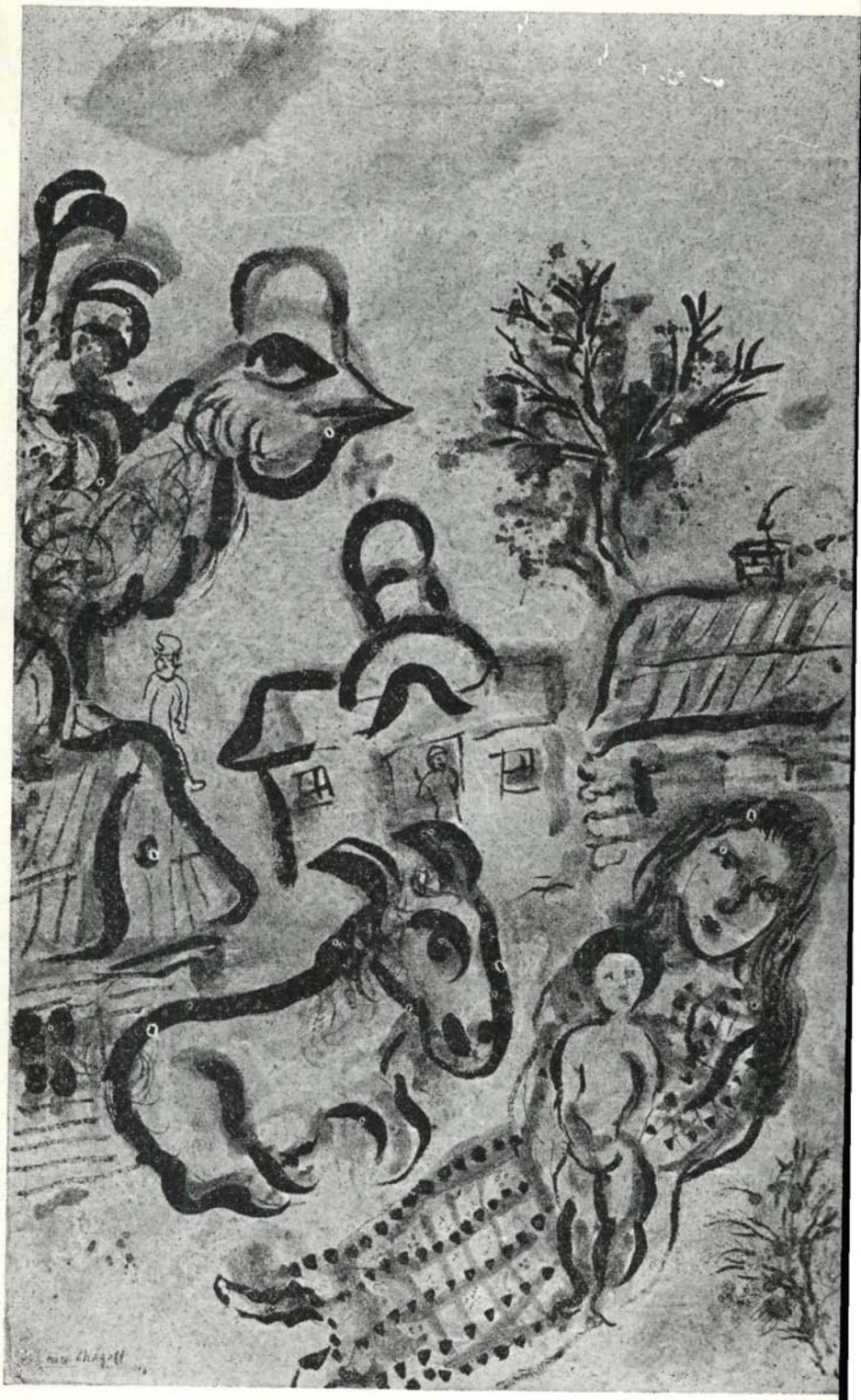

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Chapter 2

Off through the coconut trees there was a long line of jungle about a hundred and fifty yards from the bivouac. Through the steaming, chill curtain of ~~the~~ tropical rain it looked more like a wall than anything else. Solid and dense, sweeping away to the foothills in the distance, it might have been an ancient ~~avalanche of~~ green lava ~~which had~~ rolled down ~~from~~ some volcano to form this flat-topped plateau a hundred feet high: and up the steep green slope of which one might have climbed, ~~or so it seemed,~~ to walk away over the top on a surface at least as solid as the wet earth on which they stood. Almost invisible in the rain at times, it loomed there, making them aware of it even when they couldn't see it, a fact of nature like a mountain or an ocean and equally as ~~deflating to the human ego.~~

In the coconut grove they worked doggedly to set up their camp. The rain came straight down, unaccompanied by any wind. A quarter of a mile away they could see the humid sun shining brightly down into the apparently endless cocopalms. But here it came down in bucketsful --in huge, fat drops so close together that it actually seemed as though it were a solid sheet of water which

Manuscript page from Jones's work in progress, a novel of combat in the Pacific.

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Sketch by Birnkrant

THE ART OF FICTION XXIII

JAMES JONES

James Jones was interviewed in the sitting-room of his rented apartment on the Ile de la Cité where he now lives with his lovely wife, Gloria, and a Burmese cat called Hortense who was any moment expecting an expensive ($150 per kitten) litter of her kind. The sitting-room is furnished with an over-stuffed day-bed; an old wooden table littered with half-empty bottles of Scotch, Haut-Brion, and quarterly magazines; and an odd assortment of straight-backed chairs variously upholstered in bright red, blue and royal purple. Although the Joneses are quick to deny responsibility for the discord of color which plays about the room, they are proud

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of the many paintings which they have bought since coming to Paris. One of these is a delightful representation of the view from the window for which Jones commissioned a ten year-old boy whom he saw last summer painting nearby along the Seine. This view is of the quai, the river, and across the river, the Hotel de Ville. Barges churn by under the window and to the right, upstream, one sees the water swirling under the stern of the Ile St-Louis. It is what Jones looks out upon as he sits each morning over the typewriter, chain smoking, writing in bursts of stenographic speed.

Although it was evening when we began and Jones had left his desk some hours before, he was still dressed for work. Tight khaki pants and a loose green sweater set off his slim hips, heavy round-shouldered torso, and thick neck. From time to time as he talked, Jones would get up and pace the room with a peculiar rolling gait which spoke more of the former Golden Gloves contender than of the ex-soldier who had loved close order drill. He speaks with slow concentration, the Illinois drawl very evident; and one has the impression that he prefers an Anglo-Saxon obscenity to a word with a Latin root. But if violence is always near the surface of Jones's talk, his voice and manner are warm and gentle; the violence is in his own struggle with language itself. One feels finally that he is happier in questioning and listening, which he does with an intensity that is almost disconcerting. Though increasingly wary of interviews, Jones was on this occasion as generous with his time and thoughts as he is always with his whisky. By way of a warm-up he suggested a game of darts, but in spite of Jones's anxious coaching, the interviewer proved an indifferent player, and the session was quickly elevated to a discussion of less serious matters.

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INTERVIEWER

For a starter, let's talk about why you have come to Paris. I understand you have sold the house you had built in Illinois and have moved here more or less permanently.

JONES

Well, I suppose my prime excuse, at least in the beginning, was a novel I've had planned to write about Americans in Paris, Americans of *my* generation as distinct from Americans in the 'Twenties. That in itself is fascinating: the difference in flavor between the two generations. It's a lot more complicated than that but essentially it will have to do with jazzmen, some French and some American, and writers too. But the original idea was to build it around the life and character of Django Reinhardt, the gypsy guitarist.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, I remember that you wrote something about him in *From Here to Eternity*.

JONES

That's the guy. I've always loved his music, better than any other single jazz musician I've heard. Because of that, I got fascinated by what I read and heard about him. He seems to have been a really total individualist, in the sense that gypsies often are: without loyalty of any sort to any country; I mean totally amoral in any political sense. And the jazz part of it fits in here too, you see; because jazz and the jazz life are, after all, semi-illegal. Always have been—from the early days of Storyville and the riverboats: I mean, whorehouses, boozing, bars, dope, even crime, all that stuff. I think that's one of the reasons jazz has attracted each succeeding generation of young Americans. It's a pretty amoral sort of life really, and is one way of escaping the increasingly encroaching controls of a bureaucratic government. Jazz and jazzmen live pretty much on the edge of the law—no matter how the propagandists of any country try to drag them by the hair into the national morality. They are never really outlaws, or outlawed, but they can always be found some-

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where on that amorphous fringe. So what I want to explore in this novel is whether Django's type of individuality can exist today in any form. And I think that if it can survive it will be there, in jazz and that type of life, in near-illegality if you will, that we will have to look for it.

INTERVIEWER

Having left America as you have, do you think of the move as a political gesture, a cutting off of national affiliation?

JONES

Oh no. Not at all. I'm an American, and always will be. I happen to love that big, awkward, sprawling country very much—and its big, awkward sprawling people. Anyway, I don't like politics; and I don't make "political gestures," as you call it. I don't even believe in politics. To me politics is like one of those annoying, and potentially dangerous, but generally just painful, chronic diseases that you just have to put up with in your life if you happen to have contracted it. Politics is like having diabetes. It's a science, a catch-as-catch-can science, which has grown up out of simple animal necessity more than anything else. If I were twice as big as I am, and twice as physically strong, I think I'd be a total anarchist. As it is, since I'm physically a pretty little guy... No; in fact one reason I left was because I believe it is good for an American writer to get outside his country—outside his *continent*—and see it from a vantage point outside its pervading emotional climate.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mean to imply that the American climate of opinion is essentially hostile to the kind of individuality that Reinhardt, and this kind of life, expressed?

JONES

I think any national climate of opinion would be, in the world of today. My grandfather had a saying he used to say to me when I was a kid: "Bodder," he would say, (that was a

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nickname he had for me), "always remember that I'm always for you, but I'd rather be for you when you're right than when you're wrong." Well, thats the way I feel about America. There's no use trying to say we haven't done a lot of things that were bad. We have. Like McCarthy, and the sub-committee hearings, forcing Americans to rat on their friends, putting Ring Lardner and those others in jail for refusing to, forcing still others to abscond, refusing others the right to work and blacklisting them. That's a pretty black mark to have to live down. But those things are changing some now. And guys like Arthur Miller can still get up and fight back, and make it stick. And at least in America a writer can still write pretty much what he wants to say—at least, he can say more of it than anywhere else in the world today. Except maybe England.

INTERVIEWER

Incidentally, did you have any difficulty in getting *Eternity* published?

JONES

Well, some; I guess. But it was all sexual, not political. My editor and I went over it with the lawyers beforehand, and we had to cut some scenes and a lot of four-letter words. Then about two years after it came out there was some talk about banning it from the mails. Some devout Catholic postal inspector had discovered it. But it never was. We had to cut some of the sex in *Some Came Running*, too. I find it a curious comment on the world we live in that we make such a distinction between what we can say, and do, and be, in private—and in public. My two books and what we had to cut from them are a good example of this.

INTERVIEWER

Well, now that you're settled here in Paris, do you ever plan to go back to America to live?

JONES

Oh, sure. Eventually. But I've also got a book I want to do

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with an Italian background before we go home. Both of these novels, the Paris one and the Italian one, will be really major novels. Or I hope they will. Both are pretty big bites to chew, if they come off like I am planning them. I've been making notes on both for several years. So it'll be a pretty long time before we go back.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that your attitude toward your work has changed since your living here?

JONES

No, no; I find it easy enough to work anywhere... That is, if I don't get *too* drunk every night. Although it was not very long ago that I discovered this. In getting married, leaving Illinois for New York and then Paris, I sort of resolved a question in my own mind, which was whether I could live from day to day with a family and friends around me and continue to do the kind of work I want to achieve. I was afraid I couldn't; I was afraid I had to be isolated in order to write.

INTERVIEWER

Was it to provide this isolation for other writers that you built (largely with the profits of *Eternity*, I believe) a writers' colony in Marshall, Illinois?

JONES

Well, that idea was part of my own make-up at the time, yea. But it wasn't for isolation so much. A colony like that had always been one of my dreams. I honestly believed that if you gave guys who wanted to write a place to do it where they could live and eat free, then they *would* write. Take away the economic-worry factor. But it didn't work. It cost me a lot of dough, too. To learn that there was a lot more to it than that. It just doesn't work. I guess we all want to believe people are better than they are. But most of those guys there, even though they all wanted desperately to write, even though they had food and no rent and their utilities,

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still didn't write. I guess you just can't pick up any Joe off the street and turn him into a writer by setting him down to copying the great books. And besides, if you are young (and most of them out there were), 25 or so, that's not going to be enough to write about all the rest of your life. Anyway, they just wouldn't work, most of them. You have to really work at it to write. I guess there has to be talent first; but even with talent you still have to *work* at it, to write. Anyway, three pretty good novels came out of that thing; and two of the guys have finished second novels.

INTERVIEWER

Could you tell me something about your own work habits?

JONES

They're pretty normal, I guess. I get up earlier than most guys—between seven and eight—but only because I like to go out in the afternoons while there's still sun. After I get up it takes me an hour and a half of fiddling around before I can get up the courage and nerve to go to work. I smoke half a pack of cigarettes, drink six or seven cups of coffee, read over what I wrote the day before. Finally there's no further excuse. I go to the typewriter. Four to six hours of it. Then I quit and we go out. Or stay home and read.

INTERVIEWER

How much do you get done in a day?

JONES

It all depends. It might be two typescript pages, or it might be even less. Or; if it's a dialogue or a scene I had well fixed in my mind, I might get as much as ten or twelve. Usually though, it's a lot less. Three pages maybe. And then I often have to go back over it all the next day because I'm still dissatisfied. I guess I've got some neurotic compulsion to make everything as perfect as I can before I go on.

INTERVIEWER

You do a great deal of revision then?

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JONES

Oh, yes. For instance, take this scene—this chapter, or section, really—that I've been working on lately. You see, because of the nature of the book I'm working on now, I'm doing it in... well, in sections, very long chapters of around a hundred pages, which will be interlarded with what I call "Interchapters", very short pieces from another time and viewpoint. It just has to be done that way, or in some similar way. I won't go into details but actually I've been working for two months now on about 40 pages—which I now think are good enough to let go. Well, out of those forty pages there are maybe six, maybe seven pages of dialogue which I wrote in about a half an hour. Half an hour out of two months' work, but I haven't changed a word of it. It's good.

INTERVIEWER

You find, then, that writing dialogue is easier than straight narrative?

JONES

Yes. That's what I'm saying. But I have a reservation. Dialogue is almost too easy. For me. So much so that it makes me suspicious of it, so I have to be careful with it. I *could* find myself evading problems of true expression because dialogue's so easy for me to do. There are many important issues and points of subtlety about people, about human behavior, that I want to make in writing, and it's easy to evade these—or do them superficially, do them halfway—by simply writing good dialogue. And it becomes increasingly easy as I get to know the people better. But good dialogue just isn't enough to explain the subtler ramifications of the characters and incidents which I'm trying to work out now. Not *realistic* dialogue, anyway. Perhaps if you used some kind of surrealistic dialogue, but then it would read like a dream episode. It wouldn't be real talk. For instance, it's obvious enough that in almost any conversation things are happening to the people in the conversation which they do not and cannot express. In a play it is possible for a good actor to imply that he is thinking something other than

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what he is saying. But it's pretty slipshod and half-assed, because he cannot convey what he's thinking *explicitly*. In prose, and especially in the novel form, this can be done. If the man is using a subterfuge, it can be explained explicitly, and why. Actually, in life, conversation is more often likely to be an attempt at deliberate evasion, deliberate confusion, rather than communication. We're all cheats and liars, really. And the novelist can show just how and why we are.

INTERVIEWER

I have heard you say that *Some Came Running* was the best novel you have written to date. Do you have favorites among your characters as well?

JONES

It's true that I think *Running* is my best work. It was—among a lot of other things, of course—an experiment, an experiment in the use of colloquial forms in expositional and narrative writing. I think that a classic style in writing tends to remove the reader one level from the immediacy of the experience. For any normal reader; I think a colloquial style makes him feel more as though he is within the action, instead of just reading about it. And—

INTERVIEWER

Do you always keep a sort of abstract potential reader in mind, when you write?

JONES

I think one has to. I know there are a lot of writers who say to hell with "the reader"; if he has to work to read me then let him work, if he wants to read me. I don't know what I feel, myself. I guess I would fall somewhere in between the two extremes. I think the writer ought to help the reader as much as he can without damaging what he wants to say; and I don't think it ever hurts the writer to sort of stand back now and then and look at his stuff as if he were reading it instead of writing it.

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INTERVIEWER

What were you saying about *Some Came Running?*

JONES

Another reason I like *Running* so much is because of the characters. They are much more like real people, more subtle and devious than the characters in *Eternity*. And that's why I think it is much better writing. *Running* gets down deeper into its people than *Eternity*. But as for my preference for any one of the characters in my books; I have two kinds. One is sentimental and the other is professional. For instance old Jane Staley is one of my favorites sentimentally, but from a professional point of view I'm more fond of Frank Hirsh than any character in *Eternity*. Largely because my study of Frank Hirsch reaches much deeper levels, gets down much closer to that self-delusive deviousness we humans all labor under.

INTERVIEWER

Do you draw your characters from life?

JONES

I guess so; yes. But by the time I'm done with them, they're not like anybody else but themselves. It would be better to say I use them as springboards. It's funny; I've been accused by various reviewers or critical writers of portraying myself—autobiographically—in nearly all of my characters. It's been said that I was Prewitt; it's been said that I was Warden; it's been said that I was Dave Hirsh. I couldn't be them all. I've actually had people, who of course romanticized Prewitt as a hero, flatly refuse to believe I didn't draw Prewitt from myself, even when I told them I hadn't. I guess it's true that when I was younger and more romantic, I would have liked to have been Prewitt, and Warden too for that matter. On the other hand, I certainly wouldn't want to be Dave Hirsh. But by and large I guess I take my characters from people I've known at one time or another. Sometimes, though, it's simply an event which strikes me and then I try to imagine a character who would fit into that event.

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For instance, the man who was killed by Fatso Judson in the Stockade, Blues Berry; I never knew him at all.

INTERVIEWER

Were you ever in the Stockade?

JONES

You mean the Post Stockade at Schofield Barracks? No, I never was personally. But more than that I wouldn't like to say.

INTERVIEWER

Let me ask you a more abstract question then. Novels as long as *Eternity* and *Running* must have presented enormous organizational problems. Can you describe how you go about building the structure of a novel?

JONES

I don't "go about it," I work it out as I go along. I begin with a problem that interests or excites me, like that of individualism and the fringe-society of jazz which we were talking about a while ago. Then I take a character who, to some extent, represents the abstract idea of the problem. Not as a symbol, though; I don't like making symbols out of characters. No human being is really a symbol. In *The Pistol* Mast and the other characters are deliberately symbolic of various aspects of humanity, all hunting for some kind of salvation, which is symbolized by the pistol itself, and the story itself is a symbol of all the ridiculous, outrageous cruelties people will perpetrate upon each other when they think they can acquire salvation for themselves by doing so. The whole thing of *The Pistol* is an experiment in writing a deliberately symbolic little novella. It's okay, for an easy job, an easy out. But human beings themselves are never that easy to symbolize, they're never all black or all white like that, they aren't really any longer human at all. That's why it's so easy to kill real people in the name of some damned ideology or other; once the killer can abstract them in his own mind into being symbols, then he needn't feel guilty for

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killing them since they're no longer real human beings. And symbolizing characters like that is just as easy an out for the writer as for the ideological killer. I prefer to write about characters who aren't that easily categorized. In this type of novel, the problem is there, and I can actually give it a concrete written definition. I always try to do that. But instead of laying out the abstract idea—if A is put against B then C will result—I take the people, one of whom will more or less represent A (but who has the right to not represent A, if he so chooses), and one of whom will more or less represent B. Then when I set A against B, maybe Z or X will result, instead of C. Because by allowing that unknown to exist in there, I won't actually be able to know what will happen until it writes its own answer. Because after all, this problem, whatever it is, is a question which I haven't answered, and a question which I don't feel qualified to answer, wouldn't presume to answer, for myself or anybody else. And by doing it that way I'm letting the people write their own story themselves. For example, I had written 300 pages of *Eternity* before I realized that Warden was going to have an affair with Karen Holmes. So I had to go back and bring that about. But even then I didn't know how it would end. I knew only that because of their situation it wouldn't, *couldn't*, work out. And in *Running;* I guess I worked on that book for three years before I knew whether Dave Hirsh would actually marry that slob, Ginnie Moorehead, and then it was another year before I was able to find out whether he would leave her or not after he did marry her. But as for the *structure* of *Running*, I think it is sound. If I may flatter myself a little in this interview without making too many enemies, I would like to say that I believe I have a knack, or whatever you want to call it, for structural organization. I'll grant much of the ...

INTERVIEWER

Criticism?

JONES

Hell! Criticism is hardly strong enough a word for what was said about me. I'll grant it *is* too long perhaps in places;

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but I feel I have the right to over-write now and then if it's something that interests me and I want to put it in—as long as it is accurate within the framework of the characterization. So anyway, I think it could have been cut a little more than we actually did. Maybe even as much as another hundred pages plus the 150 which we did take out of the original 2500 type-script pages. But a good case in point is the "road-driving" episode where 'Bama teaches Dave how to drive well, which has been bombed and strafed and shot off at the ankles by so many critics. Sure, it could have been cut without damaging the essential story; but it is an American phenomenon which I, anyway, have never seen written about, and I think it's interesting and I'm glad I left it in. If I hadn't, this facet of American life on that long, flat continent might never have been written about in just that way. So what the hell?

INTERVIEWER

Another critic, Leslie Feidler, has written a more ambitious essay on *From Here to Eternity*. He entitled it *The Bum as American Culture Hero* and his point was that the Ishmael figure, which is almost constant in American literature, was re-cast in the novels of Steinback and Dos Passos as the man on the bum. He goes on to say that with Prewitt the bum turns up again, this time at the end of his wandering, in the Army. But in the Army he is recognized as an artist. The Army gave him his bugle, but it was being on the bum that made him an artist.

JONES

Well, okay. But so what? I mean what's his conclusion from all this? I don't say I especially disagree with him, at least not yet—except on one point. I don't agree that it was being on the bum that made Prewitt an "artist." What made Prewitt an artist, in my interpretation, was that his old man used to beat up his old lady, as well as himself; and that his old man, like so many human male animals, didn't give a damn about him one way or the other. He was always

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competing, in a sense, with this image of his father which he was always trying to please... But as for the bum-heros of Steinbeck and Dos Passos, whether they're the inheritors of Ishmael or not, and I guess they are, the main point about them is that they were all involved in the social revolution that came in the '30s. What's interesting is that if Prewitt is *their* heir, Prewitt as the wanderer had no place left to go *except* into the Army—where he became, artist or not, a ward of the government. Which is what is happening everywhere, today, even with businessmen. A government ward who, whatever else he is, is first of all at the call of government to fight for it, or what have you. But the Army which Prewitt entered in the late 'Thirties was not then the same total tool of government that the Army of today is. It was not; in actual effect, the Army which Dewey Cole and Hubie Murson went back to after four years of meaningless civil life after World War II, in *Some Came Running*. And that makes it even more grim.

But I would like to make the point here, also, that if it is true that what Feidler calls a "bum" is a culture hero of some modern American writers, I think it is because these writers are tired of the phoniness of superficial culture and the shallow kind of relationships which this makes for. Another critic Edmund Fuller says somewhat the same thing as Feidler, but much more complainingly. He calls it the "slob philosophy." And he calls *them* slobs: the "hero-bums." I don't think Prewitt is a slob, but to a man of Mr. Fuller's calibre he probably is a slob. He is crude, vulgar, and Fuller probably thinks he's insensitive as well. The same would be true of Dave Hirsh.

INTERVIEWER

I think Dave Hirsh is a slob.

JONES

Well, in many ways he is; but that's part of the point of the book, the end of which is when he ceases to be a slob. And this has been a very painful thing for him to learn.

But these fellows like Fuller take an unfair advantage of

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my characters, with their superficial social categorizing. I think of a slob as someone who has an inordinate ego which makes him close his mind down around his small beliefs and prejudices. By that definition even an intellectual like Mr. Fuller might qualify. I don't give a damn whether Dave Hirsh has a Ph. D. or whether he has even gone to school or not. I don't think education can make a man more sensitive. I think only the experiences in his life, if he is able to face and accept them, can do that. In that sense, education can even help make a man a "slob", by my definition, because he can take refuge in it by pretending to be sensitive when in fact he is not.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that an academic education can injure a writer?

JONES

I think it can very easily. Though it doesn't necessarily have to. Most of the desultory courses that I've taken in literature have had a peculiar snobism about them. An adulation of certain writers is inculcated in the student by the instructor, (who is probably a frustrated writer anyway), to the point where the student finds himself asking whether he has anything to say that Tolstoi or James haven't already said better. Moreover, most of the instruction seems to be concerned with writings rather than with how to write, which is impossible to teach anyway.

INTERVIEWER

What authors have most influenced your own writing?

JONES

I guess the same writers that have influenced most of my generation. Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Steinbeck. The older writers, too, James, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson. What do you want, a list? Joyce too, of course. In a more profound way I think first Stendhal and secondly Dostoievski have influenced me a great deal in the direction

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I've taken and my idea of what I'd like to accomplish. More than anybody else. Everybody has talked about the influence Wolfe has had on me as a writer, because I once admitted publicly that it was reading Wolfe that first decided me I wanted to be a writer. I have been accused of taking up all of Wolfe's flaws (if they are flaws) such as lack of selectivity and stylistic overwriting and a number of others. All of which I don't think is true. Wolfe actually did influence me a great deal toward becoming a writer, and I am not one of those people who indulge the current fashion of knocking Wolfe. I think he was a great writer. But I think I've moved a long way from him in viewpoint and style and even in selectivity; certainly I have in structuring novels. *(Jones takes a pen-knife from his pocket and flicks it open.)*

INTERVIEWER

Do you carry that for protection?

JONES

No. I guess you saw that damned picture of me in *Time* magazine. No. I just carry it to clean my nails with. Look. See? It's got scissors, too. As well as a nail file. And a screwdriver, and a bottle opener—which doesn't work well, incidentally.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I was just wondering. There is so much physical violence in your novels.

JONES

Yes, that's true: there is. But then physical violence does exist in life and theoretically a man ought to be able to protect himself against it. I mean that the perfect ideal would be that a man, who is essentially non-violent, would be able to defend himself against any form of violence. But this is very rare in life. But this raises one of the most important themes in *Eternity*, why Prewitt does not shoot back at the MPs who kill him as he tries to get back to his unit after his murder of Fatso Judson. You see, when Prewitt kills Fatso he is carrying

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the theory of vengeance by violence to its final logical end. But the thing is that Fatso doesn't even know why he is being killed; and when Prewitt sees that, he realizes what a fruitless thing he has done. Then at the end, when he does not fire on the men who are going to kill him, it was because he has accepted the ultimate logical end of passive resistance, which is death.

INTERVIEWER

Are you a pacifist?

JONES

Well, I would like to be. You see, as I go along I've come to consider bravery as just about the most pernicious of virtues. Bravery is a horrible thing. The human race has it left over from the animal world and we can't get rid of it. Take any situation in which a man is attacked, the natural thing for him to do is to fight back. But that's an animal reaction and I'm about convinced that in the end, the only measure by which human beings will be judged as human—by themselves or by others—will be according to what they will do in this situation. If he were truly human, a man would not fight back. But then you get the paradox of such a situation, in that he would be concurring in his own destruction. It's the rebel's suicide in Camus.

There're so many young guys, you know—young Americans and, yes, young men everywhere—a whole generation of people younger than me who have grown up feeling inadequate as men because they haven't been able to fight in a war and find out whether they are brave or not. Because it is in a effort to prove this bravery that we fight—in wars or in bars—whereas if a man were truly brave he wouldn't have to be always proving it to himself. So therefore I am forced to consider bravery suspect, and ridiculous, and dangerous. Because if there are enough young men like that who feel strongly enough about it, they can almost bring on a war, even when none of them want it, and are in fact struggling against having one. (And as far as modern war is

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concerned I *am* a pacifist. Hell, it isn't even war anymore, as far as that goes. It's an industry, a big business complex.) And it's a ridiculous thing because this bravery myth is something those young men should be able to laugh at. Of course the older men like me, their big brothers, and uncles, and maybe even their fathers, we don't help them any. Even those of us who don't openly brag. Because all the time we are talking about how scared we were in the war, we are implying tacitly that we were brave enough to stay. Whereas in actual fact we stayed because we were afraid of being laughed at, or thrown in jail, or *shot*, as far as that goes.

As a matter of fact I am at the moment trying to write a novel, a combat novel, which in addition to being a work which tells the truth about warfare as I saw it, would free all these young men from the horsehit which has been engrained in them by my generation. I don't think that combat has ever been written about truthfully; it has always been described in terms of bravery and cowardice. I won't even accept these words as terms of human reference any more. And anyway, hell, they don't even apply to what, in actual fact, modern warfare has become. And I would like to try to write about combat from outside this framework entirely. I say "try" because I have this fear of being thought a coward, too, you see, myself. I don't know if I can actually be truthfull to the spirit of what I actually felt. But I've made some strides in trying to understand myself, I think. And I think that in my life I'm less afraid of being thought a coward than I used to be.

INTERVIEWER

Your speaking of this combat novel which "will tell the truth" as you saw it reminds me of a question you make the young novelist, Wally Dennis, ask of himself in *Some Came Running*. He says, "I wonder if a guy could really write a book about people as they *really* are and still make it interesting enough to read?"

JONES

Yes. But I guess I should have said "intelligible" instead of

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"interesting," though. I have always had the feeling that each character I've created has been made into a better human being than he or she would really have been under any set of circumstances, or than the more or less model was in real life. Wally Dennis, you remember, goes on about that, about his own mother, what a stupid slob and selfish old bat his mother really is. I don't think people like to read about themselves or about others as they really are. It would be too horrifying. After all, we have to give ourselves a little of the feeling that we're human beings with a capital H and B. So we do that, and every now and then the real truth surges up to plague us from that limbo to which we've suppressed it—in that violence you were speaking about before, some form of it or other.

INTERVIEWER

So in the past you consciously romanticized your heros?

JONES

I don't know how much was conscious and how much wasn't. What I'm trying to do now is deliberately romanticize them less. I am wondering if you can create a hero—I don't like that word—a *protagonist* without romanticizing him at all. I think it might be almost unintelligible. I don't believe anyone would believe human beings were that bad, and yet we are all that bad.

INTERVIEWER

Bad? In what ways?

JONES

Bad according to the various moral codes we profess to live by. I mean that everyone's actions and thoughts are so entirely contrary to that code of ethics which we all try to set up for ourselves that people would recoil in horror if this were shown to them.

INTERVIEWER

But you are now trying to write just such a completely realistic novel?

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JONES

Yes, I am. But I don't like that word "realism" much. I have been called a realist and a naturalist but I don't know what I am. What the hell is a realist or a naturalist anyway? Edmund Fuller's definition of a realistic writer is someone who is essentially dirty—under the arms as well as in his mind. You know, not very gentlemanly.

INTERVIEWER

Let's go back to the contents of your novels for a minute. I was struck as I read them by the number of games—poker, chess, boxing, surf-boarding etc.—which figure very prominently in your work. How do you account for this, other than by the fact that games do exist?

JONES

Well, yes, of course games do exist. And it is true that I have been and still am fascinated by them. Last Sunday, for instance, I spent 8 hours straight playing English darts with some friends. We would have gone on all night if our wives hadn't stopped us. Why did we do it? I think one reason is that we got completely lost in it, in competing, and for a time thus were able to forget everything else: bills, atom bombs, can I write?, am I mad? is humanity mad? And if you win, it's great for your ego; but if you lose, well it isn't really so bad after all. It's like dope, or getting blind drunk, or gambling. But beyond that I think games are significant in people's lives because in a game everything is clearly defined. You've got the rules and a given period of time in which to play; you've got boundaries and a beginning and an end. And whether you win, lose, or draw, at least something is sure. But life ain't like that at all. So I think that people invent and play games in order to kid themselves, at least for a time, into thinking that *life* is a game; in order to forget that at the end of life there is nothing but a big blank wall.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I guess in winding up I should ask you that one great question put to every author: Why do you want to write?

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JONES

Well, I suppose you could say that I want to impose my personality upon the world. Or, you could say that I want people to know that I have lived—all depends on your viewpoint and the mood you're in. Both are true, I guess. But I do think that the quality which makes a man want to write and be read is essentially a desire for self-exposure and is masochistic. Like one of those guys who has a compulsion to take his thing out and show it on the street. I guess I wrote that somewhere. Stendhal understood this very well, and Dostoievski. But Tolstoi did not operate this way and that is why I think he is less great than these other two. You must really want to tell the truth about yourself (and no matter what any writer says, every character he creates is a part of himself, romanticized or unromanticized) but in order to do this you have to get down into yourself and try to find out what it is that makes us desire certain things and be afraid of certain other things. But then to write what you have found is essentially masochistic. I'm sure that some damned psychiatrist who doesn't write could probably show you how this is all tied in with what I feel about violence and the need for passive resistance but I don't know how useful that would be in telling you how a man becomes a writer. This is all getting pretty high-flow and pompous; don't you think? Let's go somewhere and have a drink. I should make it plain, though, that boozing does not necessarily have to go hand in hand with being a writer, as seems to be the concept in America. I therefore solemnly declare to all young men trying to become writers that they do not actually have to become drunkards first.

Nelson W. Aldrich Jr.

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LIGHT ESSAY ON A SERIOUS THEME

Wasn't the printing press itself a kind of
omen? Now it is clearer with reprinting:
the pocket Aquinas versus *Lust*
in the Afternoon (formerly *Mabel*).

It's an interesting choice. Yeats and Shakespeare,
of course, have been excellently recorded
or spend *An Evening with Eddie Guest.*
"It's *your* funeral," as they told the boy

in Baytown, Texas (who had won A FIRST-CLASS
BURIAL from the local movie palace:
"Two HORROR Pictures! Coming, HAMLET.")
Deus ex machina with a vengeance.

Did the Greeks in charge of destiny and that
ingenious machine ever have qualms about
the god inside? Could they be certain
of *not* springing an Attic Milton Berle?

It's the imagination that's finally
responsible or irresponsible. Left
to our own devices, we may find
creating them had used creation up.

—EDWARD WATKINS

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RECOIL

The bow bent remembers home long,
the years of its tree, the whine
of wind all night conditioning
it, and its answer—Twang!

To the people here who would fret me down
their way and make me bend:
By remembering hard I could startle for home
and be myself again.

—WILLIAM STAFFORD

TALKING IT OUT

Love poems (and what have I of yours
But one you did not send for jealousy,
And all my own?)
Do not define their motion, cures
For the emblazoned heart, the callow palsy
Of limbs: the bone
Alone that will not die, too deep
Beneath the flesh for any but one certain
Touch to reach,
Itself is quiet in them. Sleep
Alone knows tactics otherwise forgotten.

I speak the speech,
For there are rhymes to dispossess
Even a god, if spoken by the giver,
Though unheard;
Then in these lines I see you pass,
With whom I lay a whole night through and never
Spoke a word.

—STEPHEN ORGEL

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Jean Hélion

The career of Jean Hélion is a strange one indeed. In the years preceding the last war, he was considered generally—on the basis of smooth, elegant abstractions evoking the tubular works of a Léger whose anecdotal edges would have been polished off by a Brancusi—as one of the most promising of the younger non-figurative artists. But when abstract art triumphed after the war, Hélion turned back to the representation of reality. It was a gradual change. At first, the material world offered him little more than the trappings of an allegory. Progressively, however, the things shown by Hélion began to stand, not for ulterior mental meanings, but for themselves. And it is here that his adventure took a dramatic turn. The trees, benches, people or plows which he tries to capture with a furious and relentless fixity seem literally to volatilize before our eyes in the very act of definition. For it is one of the paradoxes of modern art that paintings which "represent nothing" look material, whereas pictures which state reality appear immaterial. The supreme difficulty is not, as Captain Ahab believed, how to strike through the mask, but how to strike at it without striking through it. There is a perilous frontier where reality transforms itself brutally into unreality, fulness into naught, life into death. The merit of Hélion's drawings is to seek obstinately to situate themselves on that sharp, that near fatal border.

Pierre Schneider

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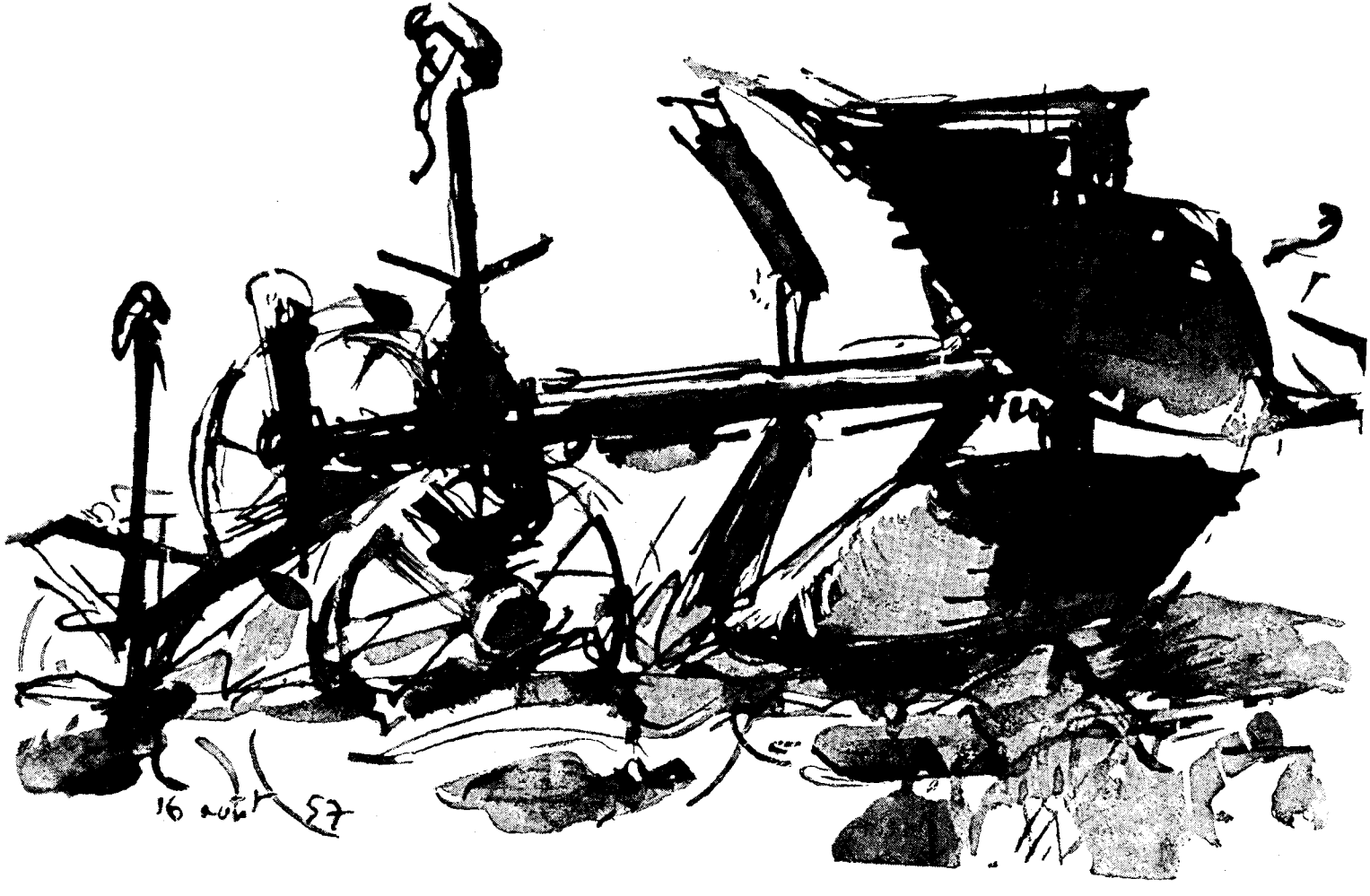

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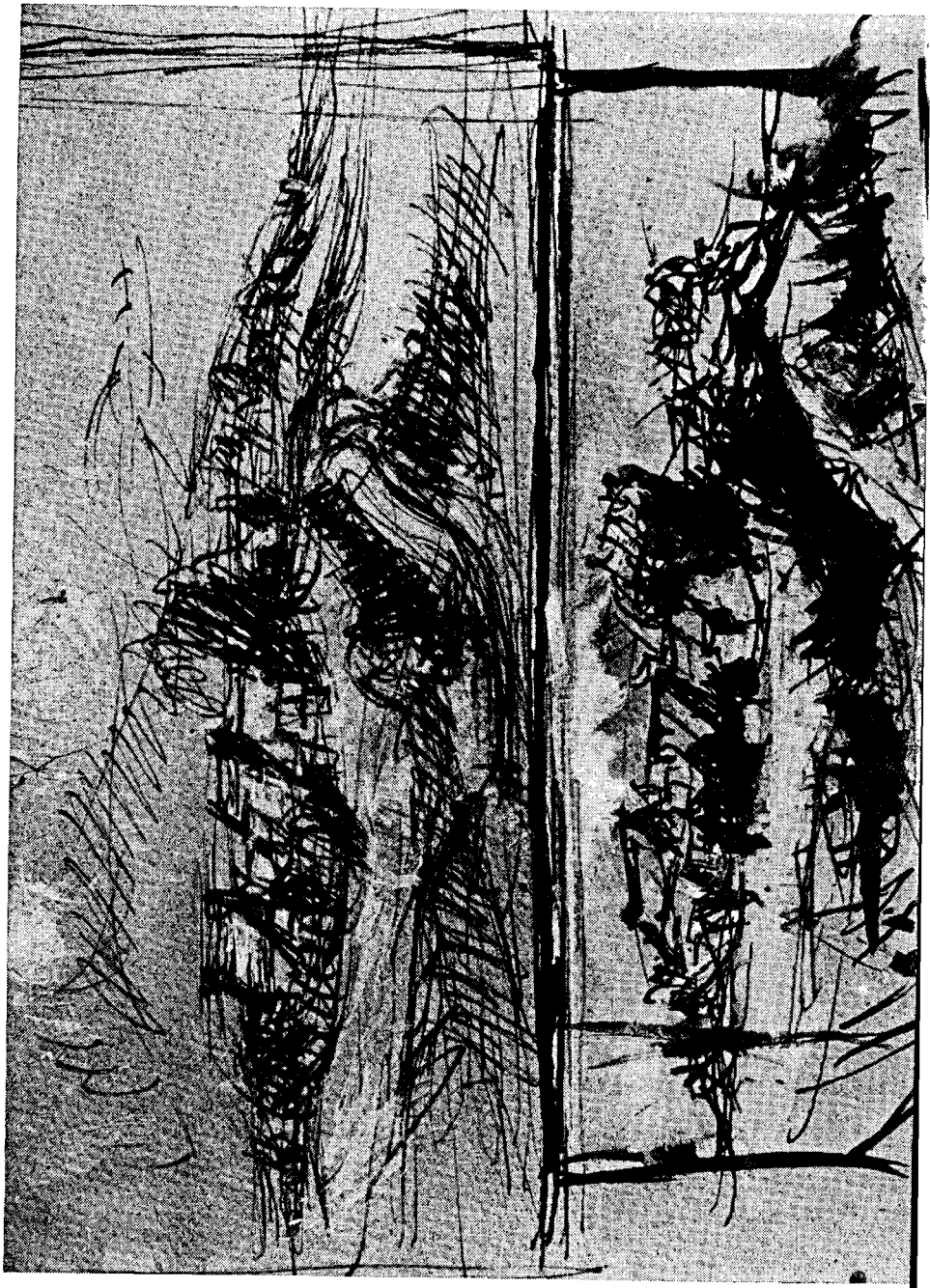

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ARBOR DAY

Near Belsen, after thirteen years,
Low clouds above the meadows shudder.
Below me mustard. Small ripe pears
Are being picked from a high ladder.

The scant tableau suggests dispersion:
Few of the living can complain.
Germany, in this quiet version,
Is laboring. It starts to rain;

And, as I leave them to their toil,
Tomatoes hang in clumsy rows.
Ahead, propped in the soft black soil
The brazen star of David grows.

—RICHARD M. ELMAN

GLUTTON

Into the flaming peach she sped,
Passing through fastnesses of flesh
Down juicy channels. Her red head

Turned regularly, like a worm's,
Hale in its element of fire.
She met the fruit on its own terms.

She tunneled into its embrace
And sank her teeth into its flesh
Utterly heedless of disgrace.

Then, when her seeking mouth had reached
Its cold, hard core, she smiled like fire,
So full, so fully self-impeached.

—THOMAS WHITBREAD

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HOLY GHOST HOSPITAL

How all things shatter, fall away, and break.
In this time of my great happiness I pass
And repass the gates of the Holy Ghost
Where all men die,
And the bridegroom comes to remember loneliness.
Around the stony saints the old men crawl,
Around and around, and all roads lead to the wall.
The street beyond is all stuffed up with toys,
Where children die, fair girls and boys,
In their narrow cribs devoured by serpents.
A dying widow combs thick yellow hair
And scatters bread crumbs from a kitchen crock.
I see the white birds in her back-street flock.
"Boidy, boidy, boidy, remember me."
This world is like a stone stuck in my shoe.
I shall die here in my loneliness, I too.
A squirrel above my head devours the bread,
And all the birds go hungry. Listen,
We are all related to the dead.
There is more sorrow now abroad
Than tears can signify,
More fear than fears can warn. Husband and priest,
Conspire with me
Against the dark-hearted sea.
No god could be well pleased with Cambridge Street.
At day's end what could descend but dust and darkness
On this hanging tree,
On my love and me.

—ALLEN GROSSMAN

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A FROG, LEAPING

Leaping, you leave a fit of crystal
Rallying, in eddies, for the next disturbance.
Startled lilies regain their delicate balance
And preen for their blue images, shaking dry.

The sky simply lifts you and lands you.
You are not so much yourself as an emblem
Of dainty riskers, floating high on wires.
You would jump in spotlights in a different circus.
But you are lucky. When you drop,
It is no fall into a bowl of hoarse voices,
But a dive into weaving crowds of green.
O emerald acrobat! Your hazard is not down but up.

—RALPH POMEROY

IN A CORNER OF EDEN

In a corner of Eden
the one-horned black
rare rhinoceros slept in the shade,
water among the reeds softly swam
yellow and green the ripening melons hang
softly slept.
In the hot light once
he went, stinking shade drops
dark over his head,
in Eden once
easy-bellied he lay
and breathed a gentle breath such as yellow
fruit or any sleeping beast may.

—PETER LEVI, S. J.

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ICON

Your eyes show peace, discord
is foreign to your lips;
most necessary motion
tranquillity resists.
You are the modern icon
spared when the vestry crashed.
In downdrafts of light your body
is abstemious of flesh.

Can one be born still out
of a mound, chary of Adam?
The shocked waif caressing brass
in the afternoon of Sodom
knows frailty above dolls,
her furious senses engaged
with lust, wise to the urges
burned church and wrecked bridges.

This beauty is profane
that's dulled with dew and rose,
to the solitary shell
sole servant, ocean's host
and child. The whey moon houses
less truculent disdain
than your green eyes whose bed
is glass and agate stone.

And yet I love, pretend
accord the natural pass
and what moves with your hands
not rude nor ever distressed,
though I shall bleed for this
and hear the horror mount
married as everyman
to fouled avenues and want.

—E. G. BURROWS

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PHILIP ROTH

GOODBYE, COLUMBUS

THE first time I saw Brenda she asked me to hold her glasses. Then she stepped out to the edge of the diving board and looked foggily into the pool; it could have been drained, myopic Brenda would never have known it. She dove beautifully, and a moment later she was swimming back to the side of the pool, her head of short-clipped auburn hair held up, straight ahead of her, as though it were a rose on a long stem. The rose glided dry to the edge and then it was beside me. "Thank you," she said, her eyes watery though not from the water. She extended a hand for her glasses but did not put them on until she turned and headed away. I watched her move off. Her hands suddenly appeared behind her. She caught the bottom of her suit between thumb and index finger and flicked what flesh had been showing back where it belonged. My blood jumped.

That night, before dinner, I called her.

"Who are you calling?" my Aunt Gladys asked.

"Some girl I met today."

"Doris introduced you?"

"Doris wouldn't introduce me to the guy who drains the pool, Aunt Gladys."

"Don't criticize all the time. A cousin's a cousin. How did you meet her?"

"I didn't really meet her. I saw her."

"Who is she?"

"Her last name is Patimkin."

"Patimkin I don't know," Aunt Gladys said, as if she knew anybody who belonged to the Green Lane Country Club. "You're going to call her you don't know her?"

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"Yes," I explained. "I'll introduce myself."

"Casanova," she said, and went back to preparing my uncle's dinner. None of us ate together: my Aunt Gladys ate at five o' clock, my cousin Susan at five thirty, me at six, and my uncle at six thirty. There is nothing to explain this beyond the fact that my aunt is crazy.

"Where's the suburban phone book?" I asked after pulling out all the books tucked under the telephone table.

"What?"

"The suburban phone book. I want to call Short Hills."

"That skinny book? What, I gotta clutter my house with that, I never use it?"

"Where is it?"

"Under the dresser where the leg came off."

"For God's sake," I said.

"Call information better. You'll go yanking around there, you'll mess up my drawers. Don't bother me, you see your uncle'll be home soon. I haven't even fed *you* yet."

"Aunt Gladys, suppose tonight we all eat together. It's hot, it'll be easier for you."

"Sure, I should serve four different meals at once. You eat pot roast, Susan with the cottage cheese, Max has steak. Friday night is his steak night, I wouldn't deny him. And I'm having a little cold chicken. I should jump up and down twenty different times? What am I, a workhorse?"

"Why don't we all have steak, or cold chicken—"

"Twenty years I'm running a house. Go call your girl friend."

But when I called, Brenda Patimkin wasn't home. She's having dinner at the club, a woman's voice told me. Will she be home after (my voice was two octaves higher than a choir boy's)? I don't know, the voice said, she may go driving golf balls. Who is this? I mumbled some words—nobody she wouldn't know I'll call back no message thank you sorry to bother... I hung up somewhere along in there. Then my aunt called me and I steeled myself for dinner.

She pushed the black whirring fan up to *High* and that way it managed to stir the cord that hung from the kitchen light.

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"What kind of soda you want? I got ginger ale, plain seltzer, black raspberry, and a bottle of cream soda I could open up."

"None, thank you."

"You want water?"

"I don't drink with my meals. Aunt Gladys, I've told you that every day for a year already—"

"Max could drink a whole case with his chopped liver only. He works hard all day. If you worked hard you'd drink more."

At the stove she heaped up a plate with pot roast, gravy, boiled potatoes, and peas and carrots. She put it in front of me and I could feel the heat of the food in my face. Then she cut two pieces of rye bread and put that next to me, on the table.

I forked a potato in half and ate it, while Aunt Gladys, who had seated herself across from me, watched. "You don't want bread," she said, "I wouldn't cut it it should go stale."

"I *want* bread," I said.

"You don't like with seeds, do you?"

I tore a piece of bread in half and ate it.

"How's the meat?" she said.

"Okay. Good."

"You'll fill yourself with potatoes and bread, the meat you'll leave over I'll have to throw it out."

Suddenly she leaped up from the chair. "Salt!" When she returned to the table she plunked a salt shaker down in front of me—pepper wasn't served in her home: she'd heard on Galen Drake that it was not absorbed by the body, and it was disturbing to Aunt Gladys to think that anything she served might pass through a gullet, stomach, and bowel just for the pleasure of the trip.

"You're going to pick the peas out is all? You tell me that, I wouldn't buy with the carrots."

"I love carrots," I said, "I love them." And to prove it, I dumped half of them down my throat and the other half on to my trousers.

"Pig," she said.

Though I am very fond of desserts, especially fruit, I chose

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not to have any. I wanted, this hot night, to avoid the conversation that revolved around my choosing fresh fruit over canned fruit, or canned fruit over fresh fruit; whichever I preferred, Aunt Gladys always had an abundance of the other jamming her refrigerator like stolen diamonds. "He wants canned peaches, I have a refrigerator full of grapes I have to get rid of..." Life was a throwing off for poor Aunt Gladys; her greatest joys were taking out the garbage, emptying her pantry, and boxing threadbare garments for the poor Jews in Palestine. I only hope she dies with an empty refrigerator, otherwise she'll ruin eternity for everyone else, what with her Velveeta turning green and her navel oranges growing fuzzy jackets down below.

My Uncle Max came home and while I dialled Brenda's number once again, I could hear soda bottles being popped open in the kitchen. The voice that answered this time was high, curt, and tired. "Hullo."

I launched into my speech. "Hello-Brenda-Brenda-you-don't-know-me-that-is-you-don't-know-my-name-but-I-held-your-glasses-for-you-this-afternoon-at-the-club...You-asked-me-to-I'm-not-a-member-my-cousin-Doris-is-Doris-Klugman-I-asked-who-you-were..." I breathed, gave her a chance to speak, and then went ahead and answered the silence on the other end. "Doris? She's the one who's always reading *War and Peace*. That's how I know it's the summer, when Doris is reading *War and Peace*." Brenda didn't laugh; right from the start she was a practical girl.

"What's your name?" she said.

"Neil Klugman. I held your glasses at the board, remember?"

She answered me with a question of her own, one, I'm sure, that is an embarassment to both the homely and the fair. "What do you look like?"

"I'm... dark."

"Are you a Negro?"

"No," I said.

"What *do* you look like?"

"May I come see you tonight and show you?"

"That's nice", she laughed. "I'm playing tennis tonight."

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"I thought you were driving golf balls."

"I drove them already."

"How about after tennis?"

"I'll be sweaty after," Brenda said.

It was not to warn me to clothes-pin my nose and run in the opposite direction; it was a fact, it apparently didn't bother Brenda, but she wanted it recorded.

"I don't mind," I said, and hoped by my tone to earn a niche somewhere between the squeamish and the grubby. "Can I pick you up?"

She did not answer a minute; I heard her muttering, "Doris Klugman, Doris Klugman..." Then she said, "Yes, Briarpath Hills, eight fifteen."

"I'll be driving a—" I hung back with the year, "a tan Plymouth. So you'll know me. How will I know you?" I said with a sly, awful laugh.

"I'll be sweating," she said and hung up.

Once I'd driven out of Newark, past Irvington, and the packed-in tangle of railroad crossings, switchmen shacks, lumber yards, Dairy Queens, and used car lots, the night grew cooler. It was, in fact, as though the 180 feet that the suburbs rose in altitude above Newark brought one closer to heaven, for the sun itself became bigger, lower, and rounder, and soon I was driving past long lawns which seemed to be twirling water on themselves, and past houses where no one sat on stoops, where lights were on but no windows open, for those inside, refusing to share the very texture of life with those of us outside, regulated with a dial the amounts of moisture that were allowed access to their skin. It was only eight o' clock, and I did not want to be early, so I drove up and down the streets whose names were those of Eastern colleges, as though the township, years ago, when things were named, had planned the destinies of the sons of its citizens. I thought of my Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max sharing a Mounds bar in the cindery darkness of their alley, on beach chairs, each cool breeze sweet to them as the promise of after-

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life, and after a while I rolled onto the gravel roads of the small park where Brenda was playing tennis. Inside my glove compartment it was as though the map of *The City Streets of Newark* had metamorphosed into crickets, for those mile-long tarry streets and avenues did not exist for me any longer, and the night noises sounded loud as the blood whacking at my temples.

I parked the car under the black-green canopy of three oaks, and walked towards the sound of the tennis balls. I heard an exasperated voice say, "Deuce *again*." It was Brenda and she sounded as though she was sweating considerably. I crackled slowly up the gravel and heard Brenda again. "My ad," and then just as I rounded the path, catching a cuff full of burrs, I heard, "Game!" Her racket went spinning up in the air and she caught it neatly as I came into sight.

"Hello," I called.

"Hello, Neil. One more game," she called. Brenda's words seemed to infuriate her opponent, a pretty brown-haired girl, not quite so tall as Brenda, who stopped searching for the ball that had been driven past her, and gave both Brenda and myself a dirty look. In a moment I learned the reason why: Brenda was ahead five games to four, and her cock-suredness about there being just one game remaining aroused enough anger in her opponent for the two of us to share.

As it happened, Brenda finally won, though it took more games than she had expected. The other girl, whose name sounded like Simp, seemed happy to end it at six all, but Brenda, shifting, running, up on her toes, would not stop, and finally all I could see moving in the darkness were her glasses, a glint of them, the clasp of her belt, her socks, her sneakers, and, on occasion, the ball. The darker it got the more savagely did Brenda rush the net, which seemed curious, for I had noticed that earlier, in the light, she had stayed back, and even when she had had to rush, after smashing back a lob, she didn't look entirely happy about being so close to her opponent's racket. Her passion for winning a point seemed outmatched by an even stronger passion for maintaining her beauty as it

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was; I suspected that the red print of a tennis ball on her cheek would pain her more than losing all the points in the world. Darkness pushed her in, however, and she stroked harder, and at last Simp seemed to be running on her ankles. When it was all over Simp refused my offer of a ride home and indicated with a quality of speech borrowed from some old Katherine Hepburn movie that she could manage for herself; apparently her manor lay no further than the nearest briar patch. She did not like me nor I her, though I worried it, I'm sure, more than she did.

"Who is *she?*"

"Laura Simpson Stolowitch."

"Why don't you call her Stolo?" I asked.

"Simp is her Bennington name. The ass."

"Is that where you go to school?" I asked.

She was pushing her shirt up against her skin to dry the perspiration. "No. I go to school in Boston."

I disliked her for the answer. Whenever anyone has asked me where I went to school I come right out with it: Newark Colleges of Rutgers University. I may say it a bit too ringingly, too fast, too up-in-the-air, but I say it. For an instant Brenda reminded me of the pug-nosed little bastards from Montclair who come down to the library during vacations. While I stamp out their books, they stand around tugging their elephantine scarves until they hang to their ankles, hinting all the while at "Boston" and "New Haven."

"Boston University?" I asked, looking off at the trees.

"Radcliffe."

We were still standing on the court, bounded on all sides by white lines. Around the bushes back of the court fireflies were cutting figure-eights in the thorny-smelling air and then, as the night suddenly came all the way in, the leaves on the trees shined for an instant, as though they'd just been rained upon. Brenda walked off the court, with me a step behind her. Now I had grown accustomed to the dark, and as she ceased being merely a voice and turned into a sight again, some of my anger at her "Boston" remark floated off and I let myself appreciate her. Her hands did not twitch at her

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bottom, but the form revealed itself, covered or not, under the closeness of her khaki Bermudas. There were two wet triangles on the back of her tiny-collared white polo shirt, right where her wings would have been if she'd had a pair. She wore, to complete the picture, a tartan belt, white socks, and white tennis sneakers.

As she walked she zipped the cover on her racket.

"Are you anxious to get home?" I said.

"No."

"Let's sit here. It's pleasant."

"Okay."

We sat down on a bank of grass slanted enough for us to lean back without really leaning; from the angle it seemed as though we were preparing to watch some celestial event, the christening of a new star, the inflation to full-size of a half-ballooned moon. Brenda zipped and unzipped the cover while she spoke; for the first time she seemed edgey. Her edginess coaxed mine back, and so we were ready now for what, magically, it seemed we might be able to get by without: a meeting.

"What does your cousin Doris look like?" she asked.

"She's dark—"

"Is she—"

"No," I said. "She has freckles and dark hair and she's very tall."

"Where does she go to school?"

"Northampton."

She did not answer and I don't know how much of what I meant she had understood.

"I guess I don't know her," she said after a moment. "Is she a new member?"

"I think so. They moved to Livingstone only a couple years ago."

"Oh."

No new star appeared, at least for the next five minutes.

"Did you remember me from holding your glasses?" I said.

"Now I do," she said. "Do you live in Livingstone too?"

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"No. Newark."

"We lived in Newark when I was a baby," she offered.

"Would you like to go home?" I was suddenly angry.

"No. Let's walk though."

Brenda kicked a stone and walked a step ahead of me.

"Why is it you rush the net only after dark?" I said catching up.

She turned to me and smiled. "You noticed? Old Simp the Simpleton doesn't."

"Why do you?"

"I don't like to be up too close, unless I'm sure she won't return it."

"Why?"

"My nose."

"What?"

"I'm afraid of my nose. I had it bobbed."

"What?"

"I had my nose fixed."

"What was the matter with it."

"It was bumpy."

"A lot?"

"No," she said, "I was pretty. Now I'm prettier. My brother's having his fixed in the fall."

"Does he want to be prettier?"

She didn't answer and walked ahead of me again.

"I don't mean to sound facetious. I mean why's he doing it?"

"He *wants* to... unless he becomes a gym teacher... but he won't" she said. "We all look like my father."

"Is he having his fixed?"

"Why are you so nasty?"

"I'm not. I'm sorry." My next question was prompted by a desire to sound interested and thereby regain civility; it didn't quite come out as I'd expected—I said it too loud. "How much does it cost?"

Brenda waited a moment but then she answered. "A thousand dollars. Unless you go to a butcher."

"Let me see if you got your money's worth."

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She turned again; she stood next to a bench and put the racket down on it. "If I let you kiss me would you stop being nasty?"

We had to take about two too many steps to keep the approach from being awkward, but we pursued the impulse and kissed. I felt her hand on the back of my neck and so I tugged her towards me, too violently perhaps, and slid my own hands across the side of her body and around to her back. I felt the wet spots on her shoulder blades, and beneath them, I'm sure of it, a faint fluttering, as though something stirred so deep in her breasts, so far back, it could make itself felt through her shirt. It was like the fluttering of wings, tiny wings no bigger than her breasts. The smallness of the wings did not bother me—it would not take an eagle to carry me up those lousy 180 feet that make summer nights so much cooler in Short Hills than they are in Newark.

II

THE next day I held Brenda's glasses for her once again, this time not as momentary servant but as afternoon guest; or perhaps as both, which still was an improvement. She wore a black tank suit and went barefooted, and amongst the other women, with their Cuban heels and boned-up breasts, their knuckle-sized rings, their straw hats, which resembled immense wicker pizza plates and had been purchased, as I heard one deeply tanned woman rasp, "from the cutest little *shvartze* when we docked at Barbadoes;" amongst them Brenda was elegantly simple, like a sailor's dream of a Polynesian maiden, albeit one with prescription sun glasses and the last name of Patimkin. She brought a little slurp of water with her when she crawled back towards the pool's edge, and at the edge she grabbed up with her hands and held my ankles, tightly and wet.

"Come in," she said up to me, squinting. "We'll play."

"Your glasses," I said.

"Oh break the goddam things. I hate them."

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"Why don't you have your eyes fixed?"

"There you go again."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'll give them to Doris."

Doris, in the surprise of the summer, had gotten past Prince Andrey's departure from his wife, and now sat brooding, not, it turned out, over the lonely fate of poor Princess Liza, but at the skin which she had lately discovered to be peeling off her shoulders.

"Would you watch Brenda's glasses?" I said.

"Yes." She fluffed little scales of translucent flesh into the air. "Damn it."

I handed her the glasses.

"Well, for God's sake," she said, "I'm not going to *hold* them. Put them down. *I'm* not her slave."

"You're a pain in the ass, you know that, Doris?" Sitting there, she looked a little like Laura Simpson Stolowitch, who was, in fact, walking somewhere off at the far end of the pool, avoiding Brenda and me because (I liked to think) of the defeat Brenda had handed her the night before; or maybe (I didn't like to think) because of the strangeness of my presence. Regardless, Doris had to bear the weight of my indictment of both Simp and herself.

"Thank you," she said. "After I invite you up for the day."

"That was yesterday."

"What about last year?"

"That's right, your mother told you last year too—invite Esther's boy so when he writes his parents they won't complain we don't look after him. Every summer I get my day."

"You should have gone with them. That's not our fault. You're not our charge," and when she said it, I could just tell it was something she'd heard at home, or received in a letter one Monday mail, after she'd returned to Northampton from Stowe, or Dartmouth, or perhaps from that weekend when she'd taken a shower with her boyfriend in Lowell House.

"Tell your father not to worry. Uncle Aaron, the sport. I'll take care of myself," and I ran on back to the pool, ran

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into a dive, in fact, and came up like a dolphin beside Brenda, whose legs I slid upon with my own.

"How's Doris?" she said.

"Peeling," I said. "She's going to have her skin fixed."

"*Stop* it," she said, and dove down beneath us till I felt her clamping her hands on the soles of my feet. I pulled back and then down too, and then, at the bottom, no more than six inches above the wiggling black lines that divided the pool into lanes for races, we bubbled a kiss into each other's lips. She was smiling there, at *me*, down at the bottom of the swimming pool of the Green Lane Country Club. Way above us, legs shimmied in the water and a pair of fins skimmed greenly by: my cousin Doris could peel away to nothing for all I cared, my Aunt Gladys have twenty feedings every night, my father and mother could roast away their asthma down in the furnace of Arizona, those penniless deserters—I didn't care for anything but Brenda. I went to pull her towards me just as she started fluttering up; my hand hooked on to the front of her suit and the cloth pulled away from her. Her breasts swam towards me like two pink-nosed fish and she let me hold them. Then, in a moment, it was the sun who kissed us both, and we were out of the water, too pleased with each other to smile. Brenda shook the wetness of her hair onto my face and with the drops that touched me I felt she had made a promise to me about the summer, and, I hoped, beyond.

"Do you want your sun glasses?"

"You're close enough to see," she said. We were under a big blue umbrella, side-by-side on two chaise longues, whose plastic covers sizzled against our suits and flesh. I turned my head to look at Brenda and smelled that pleasant little burning odor in the skin of my shoulders. I turned back up to the sun, as did she, and as we talked, and it grew hotter and brighter, colors splintered under my closed eyelids.

"This is all very fast," she said.

"Nothing's happened," I said softly.

"No. I guess not. I sort of feel something has."

"In eighteen hours?"

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"Yes. I feel... pursued," she said after a moment.

"*You* invited *me*, Brenda."

"Why do you always sound a little nasty to me?"

"Did I sound nasty? I don't mean to. Truly."

"You do. *You* invited *me*, Brenda. So what?" she said. "That isn't what I mean anyway."

"I'm sorry."

"Stop apologizing. You're so automatic about it, you don't even mean it."

"Now you're being nasty to me," I said.

"No. Just stating the facts. Let's not argue. I like you." She turned her head and looked as though she too paused a second to smell the summer on her own flesh. "I like the way you look." She saved it from embarassing me with that factual tone of hers.

"Why?" I said.

"Where did you get those fine shoulders? Do you play something?"

"No," I said. "I just grew up and they came with me."

"I like your body. It's fine."

"I'm glad," I said.

"You like mine, don't you?"

"No," I said.

"Then it's denied you," she said.

I brushed her hair flat against her ear with the back of my hand and then we were silent a while.

"Brenda," I said, "you haven't asked me anything about me."

"How you feel? Do you want me to ask you how you feel?"

"Yes," I said, accepting the back door she gave me, though probably not for the same reasons she had offered it.

"How *do* you feel?"

"I want to swim."

"Okay," she said.

We spent the rest of the afternoon in the water. There were eight of those long lines painted down the length of the pool and by the end of the day I think we had parked for a while in every lane, close enough to the dark stripes to reach out and

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touch them. We came back to the chairs now and then and sang hesitant, clever, nervous, gentle dithyrambs about how we were beginning to feel towards one another. Actually we did not have the feelings we said we had until we spoke them—at least I didn't; to phrase them was to invent them and own them. We whipped our strangeness and newness into a froth that resembled love, and we dared not play too long with it, talk too much of it, or it would flatten and fizzle away. So we moved back and forth from chairs to water, from talk to silence, and considering my unshakeable edginess with Brenda, and the high walls of ego that rose, buttresses and all, between her and her knowledge of herself, we managed pretty well.

At about four o' clock, at the bottom of the pool, Brenda suddenly wrenched away from me and shot up to the surface. I shot up after her.

"What's the matter?" I said.

First she whipped the hair off her forehead. Then she pointed a hand down towards the base of the pool. "My brother," she said, coughing some water free inside her.

And suddenly, like a crew-cutted Proteus rising from the sea, Ron Patimkin emerged from the lower depths we'd just inhabited and his immensity was before us.

"Hey, Bren," he said, and pushed a palm flat into the water so that a small hurricane beat up against Brenda and me.

"What are you so happy about?" she said.

"The Yankees took two."

"Are we going to have Mickey Mantle for dinner?" she said. "When the Yankees win," she said to me, treading so easily she seemed to have turned the chlorine to marble beneath her, "we set an extra place for Mickey Mantle."

"You want to race?" Ron asked.

"No, Ronald. Go race alone."

Nobody had as yet said a word about me. I tread unobtrusively as I could, as a third party, unintroduced, will step back and say nothing, awaiting the amenities. I was tired, however, from the afternoon's sport, and wished to hell brother and sister would not tease and chat much longer.

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Fortunately Brenda introduced me. "Ronald, this is Neil Klugman. This is my brother, Ronald Patimkin."

Of all things, there in the 15 feet of water, Ron reached out his hand to shake. I returned the shake, not quite as monumentally as he apparently expected, my chin slipped an inch into the water and all at once I was exhausted.

"Want to race?" Ron asked me, good-naturedly.

"Go ahead, Neil, race with him. I want to call home and tell them you're coming to dinner."

"Am I? I'll have to call my aunt. You didn't say anything. My clothes—"

"We dine *au naturel*."

"What?" Ronald said.

"Swim, baby," Brenda said to him and it ached me some when she kissed him on the face.

I begged out of the race, saying I had to make a phone call myself, and once upon the tile blue border of the pool, looked back to see Ron taking the length in sleek, immense strokes. He gave one the feeling that after swimming the length of the pool a half dozen times he would have earned the right to drink its contents. I imagined he had, like my Uncle Max, a colossal thirst and a gigantic bladder.

Aunt Gladys did not seem relieved when I told her she'd have only three feedings to prepare that night. "Fancy-shmansy," was all she said to me on the phone.

We did not eat in the kitchen; rather, the six of us—Brenda, myself, Ron, Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin, and Brenda's little sister, Julie—sat around the dining room table, while the maid, Carlota, a Navajo-faced Negress who had little holes in her ears but no earrings, served us the meal. I was seated next to Brenda, who was dressed in what was *au naturel* for her: Bermudas, the close ones, white polo shirt, tennis sneakers and white socks. Across from me was Julie, ten, round-faced, bright, who before dinner, while the other little girls on the street had been playing with jacks and boys and each other, had been on the back lawn putting golf balls with her father.

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Mr. Patimkin reminded me of my father, except that when he spoke he did not surround each syllable with a wheeze. He was tall, strong, ungrammatical, and a ferocious eater. When he attacked his salad—after drenching it in bottled French dressing—the veins swelled under the heavy skin of his forearm. He ate three helpings of salad, Ron had four, Brenda and Julie had two, and only Mrs. Patimkin and I had one each. I did not like Mrs. Patimkin, though she was certainly the handsomest of all of us at the table. She was disastrously polite to me, and with her purple eyes, her dark hair, and large, persuasive frame, she gave me the feeling of some captive beauty, some wild princess, who had been tamed and made the servant to the king's daughter—who was Brenda.

Outside, through the wide picture window, I could see the back lawn with its twin oak trees. I say oaks, though fancifully, one might call them sporting goods trees. Beneath their branches, like fruit dropped from their limbs, were two irons, a golf ball, a tennis can, a baseball bat, a basketball, a first-baseman's glove, and what was apparently a riding crop. Further back, near the scrubs that bounded the Patimkin property and in front of the small basketball court, a square red blanket with a white "O" stitched in the center, looked to be on fire against the green grass. A breeze must have blown outside, for the net on the basket moved; inside we ate in the steady coolness of air by Westinghouse. It was a pleasure, except that eating among those Brobdingnangs, I felt for quite a while as though four inches had been clipped from my shoulders, three inches from my height, and for good measure, someone had removed my ribs and my chest had settled meekly in towards my back.

There was not much dinner conversation; eating was heavy and methodical and serious, and it would be just as well to record all that was said in one swoop, rather than indicate the sentences lost in the passing of food, the words gurgled into mouthfuls, the syntax chopped and forgotten in heapings, spillings, and gorgings.

TO RON: When's Harriet calling?

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RON: Five o' clock.

JULIE: It *was* five o' clock.

RON: Their time.

JULIE: Why is it that it's earlier in Milwaukee? Suppose you took a plane back and forth all day. You'd never get older.

BRENDA: That's right, sweetheart.

MRS. P: What do you give the child misinformation for? Is that why she goes to school?

BRENDA: I don't know why she goes to school.

MR. P: (*lovingly*) College girl.

RON: Where's Carlota? Carlota!

MRS. P: Carlota, give Ronald more.

CARLOTA: (*calling*) More what?

RON: Everything.

MR. P: Me too.

MRS. P: They'll have to *roll* you on the links.

MR. P: (*pulling his shirt up and slapping his black, curved belly*) What are you talking about? Look at that.

RON: (*yanking his T-shirt up*) Look at *this*.

BRENDA: (*to me*) Would you care to bare your middle?

ME: (*the choir boy again*) No.

MRS. P: That's right, Neil.

ME: Yes. Thank you.

CARLOTA: (*over my shoulder, like an unsummoned spirit*) Would *you* like more?

ME: No.

MR. P: He eats like a bird.

JULIE: Certain birds eat a lot.

BRENDA: Which ones?

MRS. P: Let's not talk about animals at the dinner table. Brenda, why do you encourage her?

RON: Where's Carlota, I gotta play tonight.

MR. P: Tape your wrist, don't forget.

MRS. P: Where do you live, Bill?

BRENDA: Neil.

MRS. P: Didn't I say Neil?

JULIE: You said "Where do you live, *Bill?*"

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MRS. P: I must have been thinking of something else.
RON: I hate tape. How the hell can I play in tape?
JULIE: Don't curse.
MRS. P: That's right.
MR. P: What is Mantle batting now?
JULIE: 328.
RON: 325.
JULIE: 8!
RON: 5, jerk! He got three for four in the second game.
JULIE: *Four* for four.
RON: That was an error, Minosa should have had it.
JULIE: *I* didn't think so.
BRENDA: (*to me*) See?
MRS. P: See what?
BRENDA: I was talking to Bill.
JULIE: Neil.
MR. P: Shut up and eat.
MRS. P: A little less talking, young lady.
JULIE: *I* didn't say anything.
BRENDA: She was talking to me, sweetie.
MR. P: What's this *she* business. Is that how you call your mother? What's dessert?

The phone rings, and though we are awaiting dessert, the meal seems at a formal end, for Ron breaks for his room, Julie shouts "Harriet!" and Mr. Patimkin is not wholly successful in stifling a belch, though the failure even more than the effort ingratiates him to me. Mrs. Patimkin is directing Carlota not to mix the milk silverware and the meat silverware again, and Carlota is eating a peach while she listens; under the table I feel Brenda's fingers tease my calf. I am full.

We sat under the biggest of the oak trees while out on the basketball court Mr. Patimkin played five and two with Julie. In the driveway Ron was racing the motor of the Volkswagen. "Will somebody *please* move the Chrysler out from behind me?" he called angrily. "I'm late as it is."

"Excuse me," Brenda said, getting up.

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"I think I'm behind the Chrysler," I said.

"Let's go," she said.

We backed the cars out so that Ron could hasten on to his game. Then we re-parked them and went back to watching Mr. Patimkin and Julie.

"I like your sister," I said.

"So do I," she said. "I wonder what she'll turn out to be."

"Like you," I said.

"I don't know," she said, "Better probably." And then she added, "or maybe worse. How can you tell? My father's nice to her, but I'll give her another three years with my mother... Bill," she said, musingly.

"I didn't mind that," I said. "She's very beautiful, your mother."

"I can't even think of her as my mother. She hates me. Other girls, when they pack in September, at least their mother's help them. Not mine. She'll be busy sharpening pencils for Julie's pencil box while I'm carrying my trunk around upstairs. And it's so obvious why. It's practically a case study."

"Why?"

"She's jealous. It's so corny I'm ashamed to say it. Do you know my mother had the best back-hand in New Jersey? Really, she was the best tennis player in the state, man or woman. You ought to see the pictures of her when she was a girl. She was so healthy-looking. But not chubby or anything. She was soulful, truly. I love her in those pictures. Sometimes I say to her how beautiful the pictures are. I even asked to have one blown up so I could have it at school. 'We have other things to do with our money, young lady, than spend it on old photographs.' Money! My father's up to here with it, but whenever I buy a coat you should hear her. 'You don't have to go to Bonwit's, young lady, Ohrbach's has the strongest fabrics of any of them.' Who *wants* a strong fabric! Finally I get what I want, but not till she's had a chance to aggravate me. Money is a waste for her. She doesn't even know how to enjoy it. She still thinks we live in Newark."

"But you get what you want," I said.

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"Yes. Him," and she pointed out to Mr. Patimkin who had just swished his third straight set-shot through the basket to the disgruntlement, apparently, of Julie, who stamped so hard at the ground that she raised a little duststorm around her perfect young legs.

"He's not too smart but he's sweet at least. He doesn't treat my brother the way she treats me. Thank God, for that. Oh, I'm tired of talking about them. Since my freshman year I think every conversation I've ever had has always wound up about my parents and how awful it is. It's universal. The only trouble is they don't know it."

From the way Julie and Mr. Patimkin were laughing now, out on the court, no problem could ever have seemed less universal; but, of course, it was universal for Brenda, more than that, cosmic—it made every cashmere sweater a battle with her mother, and her life, which, I was certain, consisted to a large part of cornering the market on fabrics that felt soft to the skin, took on the quality of a Hundred Year's War...

I did not intend to allow myself such unfaithful thoughts, to line up with Mrs. Patimkin while I sat beside Brenda, but I could not shake from my elephant's brain that she-still-thinks-we-live-in-Newark remark. I did not speak, however, fearful that my tone would shatter our post-dinner ease and intimacy. It had been so simple to be intimate with water pounding and securing all our pores, and later, with the sun heating them and drugging our senses, but now, in the shade and the open, cool and clothed on her own grounds, I did not want to voice a word that would lift the cover and reveal that hideous emotion I always felt for her, and is the underside of love. It will not always *stay* the underside—but I am skipping ahead.

Suddenly, little Julie was upon us. "Want to play?" she said to me. "Daddy's tired."

"C'mon," Mr. Patimkin called. "Finish for me."

I hesitated—I hadn't held a basketball since high-school—but Julie was dragging at my hand, and Brenda said, "Go ahead."

Mr. Patimkin tossed the ball towards me while I wasn't

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looking and it bounced off my chest, leaving a round dust spot, like the shadow of a moon, on my shirt. I laughed, insanely.

"Can't you catch?" Julie said.

Like her sister, she seemed to have a knack for asking practical, infuriating questions.

"Yes."

"Your turn," she said. "Daddy's behind 47 to 39. Two hundred wins."

For an instant, as I placed my toes in the little groove that over the years had been nicked into a foul line, I had one of those instantaneous waking dreams that plagues me from time to time, and sends, my friends tell me, deadly cataracts over my eyes: the sun had sunk, crickets had come and gone, the leaves had blackened, and still Julie and I stood alone on the lawn, tossing the ball at the basket; "Five hundred wins," she called, and then finally when she beat me to five hundred she called, "Now *you* have to reach it," and I did, and the night lengthened, and she called, "*Eight* hundred wins," and we played on and then it was eleven hundred that won and we played on and it never was morning.

"Shoot," Mr. Patimkin said. "You're me."

That puzzled me, but I took my set-shot and, of course, missed. With the Lord's blessing and a soft breeze, I made the lay-up.

"You have 41. I go," Julie said.

Mr. Patimkin sat on the grass at the far end of the court. He took his shirt off, and in his undershirt, and his whole day's growth of beard, looked like a trucker. Brenda's old nose fitted him well. There was a bump in it, all right; up at the bridge it seemed as though a small eight-sided diamond had been squeezed in under the skin. I knew Mr. Patimkin would never bother to have that stone cut from his face, and yet, with joy and pride, no doubt, had paid to have Brenda's diamond removed and dropped down some toilet in Fifth Avenue Hospital.

Julie missed her set-shot, and I admit to a slight, gay, flutter of heart.

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"Put a little spin on it," Mr. Patimkin told her.

"Can I take it again?" Julie asked me.

"Yes." What with paternal directions from the side-lines and my own grudging graciousness on the court, there did not seem much of a chance for me to catch up. And I wanted to, suddenly, I wanted to win, to run little Julie into the ground. Brenda was back on one elbow, under the tree, chewing on a leaf, watching. And up in the house, at the kitchen window, I could see that the curtain had swished back—the sun too low now to glare off electrical appliances—and Mrs. Patimkin was looking steadily out at the game. And then Carlota appeared on the back steps, eating a peach, and holding a pail of garbage in her free hand. She stopped to watch too.

It was my turn again. I missed the set shot and laughingly turned to Julie and said, "Can I take it again?"

"No!"

So I learned how the game was played. Over the years Mr. Patimkin had taught his daughters that free throws were theirs for the asking; he could afford to. However, with the strange eyes of Short Hills upon me, matrons, servants, and providers, I somehow felt I couldn't. But I had to and I did.

"Thanks a lot, Neil," Julie said when the game was ended —at 100—and the crickets had come.

"You're welcome."

Under the trees, Brenda smiled. "Did you let her win?"

"I think so," I said, "I'm not sure."

There was something in my voice that prompted Brenda to say, comfortingly, "Even Ron let's her win."

"It's all nice for Julie," I said.

III

THE next morning I found a parking space on Washington Street directly across from the library. Since I was twenty minutes early I decided to stroll in the park rather than cross over to work; I didn't particularly care to join my colleagues, who I knew would be sipping early morning coffee in the

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binding room, smelling still of all the orange crush they'd drunk that weekend at Asbury Park. I sat on a bench and looked out towards Broad Street and the morning traffic. The Lackawanna commuter trains were rumbling in a few blocks to the north and I could hear them, I thought—the sunny green cars, old and clean, with windows that opened all the way. Some mornings, with time to kill before work, I would walk down to the tracks and watch the open windows roll in, on their sills the elbows of tropical suits and the edges of briefcases, the properties of businessmen arriving in town from Maple wood, the Oranges, and the suburbs beyond.

The park, bordered by Washington Street on the west and Broad on the east, was empty and shady and smelled of trees, night, and dog leavings; and there was a faint damp smell too, indicating that the huge rhino of a water-cleaner had passed by already, soaking and whisking the downtown streets. Down Washington Street, behind me, was the Newark Museum—I could see it without even looking: two oriental vases in front like spitoons for a rajah, and next to it, the little annex to which we had traveled on special buses as school children. The annex was a brick building, old and vine-covered, and always reminded me of New Jersey's link with the beginning of the country, with George Washington, who had trained his scrappy army—a little bronze tablet informed us children—in the very park where I now sat. At the far end of the park, beyond the Museum, was the bank building where I had gone to college. It had been converted some years before into an extension of Rutgers University; in fact, in what once had been the bank president's waiting room I had taken a course called Contemporary Moral Issues. Though it was summer now, and I was out of college three years, it was not hard for me to remember the other students, my friends, who had worked evenings in Bamberger's and Kresge's and had used the commissions they'd earned pushing ladies' out-of-season shoes to pay their laboratory fees. And then I looked out to Broad Street again. Jammed between a grimy-windowed bookstore and a cheesey luncheonette was the marquee of a tiny art theater—how

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many years had passed since I'd stood beneath that marquee, lying about the year of my birth so as to see Hedy Lamar swim naked in *Ecstasy;* and then, having slipped the ticket-taker an extra quarter, what disappointment I had felt at the frugality of her Slavic charm... Sitting there in the park, I felt a deep knowledge of Newark, an attachment so rooted that it could not help but branch out into affection.

Suddenly it was nine o' clock and everything was scurrying. Wobblyheeled girls revolved through the doors of the telephone building across the way, traffic honked desperately, policeman barked, whistled, and waved motorists to and fro. Over at St. Vincent's Church the huge dark portals swung back and those bleary-eyes that had risen early for Mass now blinked at the light. Then the worshippers had stepped off the church steps and were racing down the streets towards desks, filing cabinets, secretaries, bosses, and—if the Lord had seen fit to remove a mite of harshness from their lives—to the comfort of air-conditioners pumping at their window. I got up and crossed over to the library, wondering if Brenda was awake yet.

The pale cement Lions stood unconvincing guard on the library steps, suffering their usual combination of elephantiasis and arteriosclerosis, and I was prepared to pay them as little attention as I had for the past eight months, were it not for a small colored boy who stood in front of one of them. The lion had lost all of its toes the summer before to a safari of juvenile delinquents; and now a new tormentor stood before him, sagging a little in his knees, and growling. He would growl, low and long, then drop back, wait, then growl again. Then he would straighten up and, shaking his head, he would say to the lion, "Man, you's a coward..." Then, once again, he'd growl.

The day began the same for me as any other. From behind the desk on the main floor, I watched the hot high-breasted teen-age girls walk twitchingly up the wide flight of marble stairs that led to the main reading room. The stairs were an imitation of a staircase somewhere in Versailles, though in their toreador pants and sweaters, these young daughters of

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Italian leather workers, Polish brewery hands, and Jewish furriers, where hardly duchesses. They were not Brenda either, and any lust that sparked inside me through the dreary day was academic and time-passing. I looked at my watch occasionally, thought of Brenda, and waited for lunch and then for after lunch, when I would take over the Information Desk upstairs and John McKee, who was only twenty-one but wore elastics bands around his sleeves, would march starchily down the stairs to work assiduously at stamping books in and out. John McRubber Bands was in his last year at Newark State Teacher's College where he was studying at the Dewey Decimal System in preparation for his life's work. The library was not going to be my life's work, I knew it. Yet, there had been some talk—from Mr. Scapello, an old eunuch who had learned somehow to disguise his voice as a man's—that when I returned from my summer vacation I would be put in charge of the Reference Room, a position that had been empty ever since that morning when Martha Winney had fallen off a high stool in the Encyclopedia Room and shattered all those frail bones that come together to form what in a woman half her age we would call the hips.

I had strange fellows at the library and, in truth, there were many hours when I never quite knew how I'd gotten there or why I stayed. But I did stay and after a while waited patiently for that day when I would go into the men's room on the main floor for a cigarette and, studying myself as I expelled smoke into the mirror, would see that at some moment during the morning I had gone pale, and that under my skin, as under McKee's and Scapello's and Miss Winney's, there was a thin cushion of air separating the blood from the flesh. Someone had pumped it there while I was stamping out a book, and so life from now on would be not a throwing off, as it was for Aunt Gladys, and not a gathering in, as it was for Brenda, but a bouncing off, a numbness. I began to fear this, and yet, in my muscleless devotion to my work, seemed edging towards it, silently, as Miss Winney used to edge up to the *Britannica*. Her stool was empty now and awaited me.

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Just before lunch the lion-tamer came wide-eyed into the library. He stood still for a moment, only his fingers moving, as though he were counting the number of marble stairs before him. Then he walked creepily about on the marble floor, snickering at the clink of his taps and the way his little noise swelled up to the vaulted ceiling. Otto, the guard at the door, told him to make less noise with his shoes, but that did not seem to bother the little boy. He clacked on his tiptoes, high, secretively, delighted at the opportunity Otto had given him to practice this posture. He tiptoed up to me.

"Hey," he said, "where's the heart section?"

"The what?" I said.

"The heart section. Ain't you got no heart section?"

He had the thickest sort of southern Negro dialect and the only word that came clear to me was the one that sounded like heart.

"How do you spell it?" I said.

"*Heart*. Man, pictures. Drawing books. Where you got them?"

"You mean art books? Reproductions?"

He took my polysyllabic word for it. "Yea, they's them."

"In a couple places," I told him. "Which artist are you interested in?"

The boy's eyes narrowed so that his whole face seemed black. He started backing away, as he had from the lion. "All of them..." he mumbled.

"That's okay," I said. "You go look at whichever ones you want. The next flight up. Follow the arrow to where it says Stack Three. You remember that? Stack Three. Ask somebody upstairs."

He did not move; he seemed to be taking my curiosity about his taste as a kind of poll-tax investigation. I slashed my face with a smile. "Go ahead, right up there..."

And like a shot he was scuffling and tapping up towards the heart section.

After lunch I came back to the in-and-out desk and there was John McKee, waiting, in his pale blue slacks, his black shoes, his barber-cloth shirt with the elastic bands, and a great

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knit tie, green, wrapped into a Windsor knot, that was huge and jumped when he talked. His breath smelled of hair oil and his hair of breath and when he spoke spittle cobwebbed the corners of his mouth. I did not like him and at times had the urge to yank back on his arm bands and sling-shoot him out past Otto and the lions into the street.

"Has a little Negro boy passed the desk? With a thick accent? He's been hiding in the art books all morning. You know what those boys *do* in there."

"I saw him come in, John."

"So did I. Has he gone *out* though?"

"I haven't noticed. I guess so."

"Those are *very* expensive books."

"Don't be so nervous, John. People are supposed to touch them."

"There is touching," John said sententiously, "and there is touching. Someone should check on him. I was afraid to leave the desk here. You know the way they treat the housing projects we give them."

"*You* give them?"

"The city. Have you ever seen what they do at Seth Boyden? They throw *beer* bottles, those big ones, on the *lawn*. They're taking over the city."

"Just the Negro sections."

"It's easy to laugh, you don't live near them. I'm going to call Mr. Scapello's office to check the Art Section. Where did he ever find out about art?"

"You'll give Mr. Scapello an ulcer, so soon after his egg and pepper sandwiches. I have to go upstairs anyway."

"You know what they do in there," John warned me.

"Don't worry, Johnny, *they're* the ones who'll get warts on their dirty little hands."

"Ha ha. Those books happen to cost—"

So that Mr. Scapello would not descend upon the boy with his chalky fingers, I walked up the three flights to Stack Three, past the receiving room where rheumy-eyed Jimmy Boylen, our fifty-one year old boy, unloaded books from a cart; past the reading room, where bums off Mulberry

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Street slept over *Popular Mechanics;* past the smoking corridor where damp-browed summer students from the law school relaxed, some smoking, others trying to rub the colored dye of their tort texts from their fingertips; and finally, past the periodical room, where a few ancient ladies who'd been motored down from Upper Montclair, now huddled in their chairs, pince-nezing over yellowed, fraying society pages in old old copies of the Newark *News.* Up on Stack Three I found the boy. He was seated on the glass-brick floor holding an open book in his lap, a book, in fact, that was bigger than his lap and had to be propped up by his knees. By the light of the window behind him I could see the hundreds of spaces between the hundreds of tiny black corkscrews that were his hair. He was very black and shiney, and the flesh of his lips did not so much appear to be a different color as it looked to be unfinished and awaiting another coat. The lips were parted, the eyes wide, and even the ears seemed to have a heightened receptivity. He looked ecstatic—until he saw me, that is. For all he knew I was John McKee.

"That's okay," I said before he could even move, "I'm just passing through. You read."

"Ain't nothing *to* read. They's pictures."

"Fine." I fished around the lowest shelves a moment, playing at work.

"Hey, Mister," the boy said after a minute, "where is this?"

"Where is what?"

"Where is these pictures? These people, man, they sure does look cool. They ain't no yelling or shouting here, you could just see it."

He lifted the book so I could see. It was an expensive large-sized edition of Gauguin reproductions. The page he had been looking at showed an $8\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 print, in color, of three native women standing knee-high in a rose-colored stream. It *was* a silent picture, he was right.

"That's Tahiti. That's an island in the Pacific Ocean."

"That ain't no place you could go, is it? Like a ree-*sort*?"

"You could go there, I suppose. It's very far. People live there..."

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"Hey, *look*, look here at this one." He flipped back to a page where a young brown-skinned maid was leaning forward on her knees, as though to dry her hair. "Man," the boy said, "that's the fuckin life." The euphoria of his diction would have earned him eternal banishment from the Newark Public Library and its branches had John or Mr. Scapello—or God forbid, the hospitalized Miss Winney—come to investigate.

"Who took these pictures?" he asked me.

"Gauguin. He didn't take them, he painted them. Paul Gauguin. He was a Frenchman."

"Is he a white man or a colored man?"

"He's white."

"Man," the boy smiled, chuckled almost, "I knew that. He don't *take* pictures like no colored men would. He's a good picture-taker... *Look*, *look*, look here at this one. Ain't that the fuckin *life?*"

I agreed it was and left.

Later I sent Jimmy Boylen hopping down the stairs to tell McKee that everything was all right. The rest of the day was uneventful. I sat at the Information Desk thinking about Brenda and reminding myself that that evening I would have to get gas before I started up to Short Hills, which I could see now, in my mind's eye, at dusk, rose-colored, like a Gauguin stream.

When I pulled up to the Patimkin house that night, everybody but Julie was waiting for me on the front porch: Mr. and Mrs., Ron, and Brenda, wearing a dress. I had not seen her in a dress before and for an instant she did not look like the same girl. But that was only half the surprise. So many of those Lincolnesque college girls turn out to be limbed for shorts alone. Not Brenda. She looked in a dress as though she'd gone through life so attired, as though she'd never worn shorts, or bathing suits, or pajamas, or anything but that pale linen dress. I walked rather bouncingly up the lawn, past the huge weeping willow, towards the waiting Patimkins,

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wishing all the while that I'd had my car washed. Before I'd even reached them, Ron stepped forward and shook my hand, vigorously, as though he hadn't seen me since the Diaspora. Mrs. Patimkin smiled and Mr. Patimkin grunted something and continued twitching his wrists before him, then raising an imaginary golf club and driving a ghost of a golf ball up and away towards the Orange Mountains, that were called Orange, I'm convinced, because in that various suburban light that's the *only* color they do not come dressed in.

"We'll be right back," Brenda said to me. "You have to sit with Julie. Carlota's off."

"Okay," I said.

"We're taking Ron to the airport."

"Okay."

"Julie doesn't want to go. She says Ron pushed her in the pool this afternoon. We've been waiting for you, so we don't miss Ron's plane. Okay?"

"*Okay.*"

Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin and Ron moved off, and I flashed Brenda just the hint of a glare. She reached out and took my hand a moment.

"How do you like me?" she said.

"You're great to baby-sit for. Am I allowed all the milk and cake I want?"

"Don't be angry, baby. We'll be right back." Then she waited a moment, and when I failed to deflate the pout from my mouth, she gave *me* a glare, no hints about it. "I *meant* how do you like me in a dress!" Then she ran off towards the Chrysler, trotting in her high heels like a colt.

When I walked into the house, I slammed the screen door behind me.

"Close the other door too," a little voice shouted. "The air-conditioning."

I closed the other door, obediently.

"Neil?" Julie called.

"Yes."

"Hi. Want to play 5 and 2?"

"No."

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"Why not?"

I did not answer.

"I'm in the television room," she called.

"Good."

"Are you supposed to stay with me?"

"Yes."

She appeared unexpectedly through the dining room. "Want to read a book report I wrote?"

"Not now."

"What do you want to do?" she said.

"Nothing, honey. Why don't you watch TV?"

"All right," she said disgustedly, and kicked her way back to the television room.

For a while I remained in the hall, bitten with the urge to slide quietly out of the house, into my car, and back to Newark, where I might even sit in the alley and break candy with my own. I felt like Carlota; no, not even as comfortable as that. At last I left the hall and began to stroll in and out of rooms on the first floor. Next to the living room was the study, a small knotty-pine room jammed with leather chairs and a complete set of *Information Please Almanacs*. On the wall hung three colored photo-paintings. They were the kind which, regardless of the subjects, be they vital or infirm, old or youthful, are characterized by bud-cheeks, wet lips, pearly teeth, and shiny, metalized hair. The subjects in this case were Ron, Brenda, and Julie at about ages 14, 13, and 2. Brenda had long auburn hair, her diamond-studded nose, and no glasses; all combined to make her look a regal thirteen year old who'd just gotten smoke into her eyes. Ron was rounder and his hairline was lower, but that love of spherical objects and lined courts twinkled in his boyish eyes. Poor little Julie was lost in the photo-painter's Platonic idea of childhood; her tiny humanity was smothered somewhere back of gobs of pink and white.

There were other pictures about, smaller ones, taken with a Brownie reflex before photo-paintings had become fashionable. There was a tiny picture of Brenda on a horse; another of Ron in Bar Mitzvah suit, *yamalkah*, and *tallas;* and two

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pictures framed together—one of a beautiful, faded woman, who must have been, from the eyes, Mrs. Patimkin's mother, and the other of Mrs. Patimkin herself, her hair in a halo, her eyes joyous and not those of a slowly aging mother with a quick and lovely daughter.

I walked through the living room into the dining room and stood a moment looking out at the sporting goods tree. From the television room that winged off the dining room, I could hear Julie listening to *This Is Your Life*. The kitchen, which winged off the other side, was empty, and apparently, with Carlota off, the Patimkins had had dinner at the club. Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin's bedroom was in the middle of the house, down the hall, next to Julie's, and for a moment I wanted to see what size bed those giants slept in—I imagined it wide and deep as a swimming pool—but I postponed my investigation while Julie was in the house, and instead opened the door in the kitchen that led down to the basement.

The basement had a different kind of coolness from the house, and it had a smell, which was something the upstairs was totally without. It felt cavernous down there, but in a comforting way, like the simulated caves children make for themselves on rainy days, in hall closets, under blankets, or in between the legs of dining room tables. I flipped on the light at the foot of the stairs and was not surprised at the pine-paneling, the bamboo furniture, the ping-pong table, and the mirrored bar that was stocked with every kind and size of glass, ice bucket, decanter, mixer, swizzle stick, shot glass, pretzel bowl—all the Bacchanalian paraphenalia, plentiful, orderly, and untouched, as it can only be in the bar of a wealthy man who never entertains drinking people, who himself does not drink, who, in fact, gets a fishy look from his wife when every several months he takes a shot of *schnapps* before dinner. I went behind the bar where there was an aluminum sink that had not seen a dirty glass, I'm sure, since Ron's Bar Mitzvah's party, and would not see another, probably, until one of the Patimkin children was married or engaged. I would have poured myself a drink—just as a wicked wage for being forced into servantry—but I was uneasy

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about breaking the label on a bottle of whiskey. You had to break a label to get a drink. On the shelf back of the bar were two dozen bottles—23 to be exact—of Jack Daniels, each with a little booklet tied to its collared neck informing patrons how patrician of them it was to drink the stuff. And over the Jack Daniels were more photos: there was a blown-up newspaper photo of Ron palming the basketball in one hand like a raisin; under the picture it said, "*Center*, Ronald Patimkin, Millburn High School, 6'4", 217 pounds." And there was another picture of Brenda on a horse, and next to that, a velvet mounting board with ribbons and medals clipped to it: Essex County Horse Show 1949, Union County Horse Show 1950, Garden State Fair 1952, Morristown Horse Show 1953, and so on—all for Brenda, for jumping and running or galloping or whatever else young girls receive ribbons for. In the entire house I hadn't seen one picture of Mr. Patimkin.

The rest of the basement, back of the wide pine-paneled room, was gray cement walls and linoleum floor and contained innumerable electrical appliances, including a freezer big enough to house a family of Eskimos. Beside the freezer, incongruously, was a tall old refrigerator; its ancient presence was a reminder to me of the Patimkin roots in Newark. This same refrigerator had once stood in a kitchen of an apartment in some four family house, probably in the same neighborhood where I had lived all my life, first with my parents and then, when the two of them went wheezing off to Arizona, with my aunt and uncle. After Pearl Harbor the refrigerator had made the move up to Short Hills; Patimkin Kitchen and Bathroom Sinks had gone to war: no new barrack was complete until it had a squad of Patimkin Sinks lined up in its latrine.

I opened the door of the old refrigerator; it was not empty. No longer did it hold butter, eggs, herring in cream sauce, ginger ale, tuna fish salad, an occasional orchid—rather it was heaped with fruit, shelves swelled with it, every color, every texture, and hidden within, every kind of pit. There were greengage plums, black plums, red plums, apricots, nectarines,

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peaches, long horns of grapes, black, yellow, red, and cherries, cherries flowing out of boxes and staining everything scarlet. And there were melons—cantalopes and honeydews—and on the top shelf, a half of a huge watermelon, a thin sheet of wax paper clinging to its bare red face like a wet lip. Oh Patimkin! Fruit grew in their refrigerator and sporting goods dropped from their trees!

I grabbed a handful of cherries and then a nectarine, and I bit right down to its pit.

"You better wash that or you'll get diarrhea."

Julie was standing behind me in the pine-paneled room. She was wearing *her* Bermudas and *her* white polo shirt which was unlike Brenda's only in that it had a little dietary history of its own.

"What?" I said.

"They're not washed yet," Julie said, and in such a way, that it seemed to place the refrigerator itself out-of-bounds, if only for me.

"That's all right," I said, and devoured the nectarine and put the pit in my pocket and stepped out of the refrigerator room, all in one second. I still didn't know what to do with the cherries. "I was just looking around," I said.

Julie didn't answer.

"Where's Ron going?" I asked, dropping the cherries into my pocket, amongst my keys and change.

"Milwaukee."

"For long?"

"To see Harriet. They're in love."

We looked at each other for longer than I could bear. "Harriet?" I asked.

"Yes."

Julie was looking at me as though she were trying to look behind me, and then I realized that I was standing with my hands out of sight. I brought them around to the front, and, I swear it, she did peek to see if they were empty.

We confronted one another again; she seemed to have a threat in her face.

Then she spoke. "Want to play ping-pong?"

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"God, yes," I said, and made for the table with two long, bounding steps. "You can serve."

Julie smiled and we began to play.

I have no excuses to offer for what happened next. I began to win and I liked it.

"Can I take that one over?" Julie said. "I hurt my finger yesterday and it just hurt when I served."

"No."

I continued to win.

"That wasn't fair, Neil. My shoelace came untied. Can I take it—"

"No."

We played, I, ferociously.

"Neil, you leaned over the table. That's illegal—"

"I didn't lean and it's not illegal."

I felt the cherries hopping among my nickles and pennies.

"Neil, you gypped me out of a point. You have nineteen and I have eleven—"

"Twenty and *ten*," I said. "Serve!"

She did and I smashed my return past her—it zoomed off the table and skitted into the refrigerator room.

"You're a cheater!" she screamed at me. "You cheat!" Her jaw was trembling as though she carried a weight on top of her pretty head. "I *hate* you!" She threw her racket across the room and it clanged off the bar, just as, outside, I heard the Chrysler crushing gravel in the driveway.

"The game isn't over," I said to her.

"You cheat! And you were stealing fruit!" she said, and ran away before I had my chance to win.

Later that night, Brenda and I made love, our first time. We were sitting on the sofa in the television room and for some ten minutes had not spoken a word to each other. Julie had long since gone to a weepy bed, and though no one had said anything to me about her crying, I did not know if the child had mentioned my fistful of cherries, which, some time before, I had flushed down the toilet.

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The television set was on and though the sound was off and the house quiet, the gray pictures still wiggled at the far end of the room. Brenda was quiet and her dress circled her legs, which were tucked back beneath her. We sat there for some while and did not speak. Then she went into the kitchen and when she came back she said that it sounded as though everyone was asleep. We sat a while longer, watching the soundless bodies on the screen eating a silent dinner in someone's silent restaurant. When I began to unbutton her dress she resisted me, and I like to think it was because she knew how lovely she looked in it. But she looked lovely, my Brenda, anyway, and we folded it carefully and held each other closely and soon there we were, Brenda falling, slowly but with a smile, and me rising.

How can I describe loving Brenda? It was so sweet, as though I'd finally scored that twenty-first point.

When I got home I dialled Brenda's number, but not before my aunt heard and rose from her bed.

"Who are you calling at this hour? The doctor?"

"No."

"What kind phone calls, one o' clock at night?"

"Shhh!" I said.

"He tells *me* shhh. Phone calls one o' clock at night, we haven't got a big enough bill," and then she dragged herself back into the bed, where, with a martyr's heart and bleary eyes she had resisted the downward tug of sleep until she'd heard my key in the door.

Brenda answered the phone.

"Neil?" she said.

"Yes," I whispered. "You didn't get out of bed, did you?"

"No," she said, "the phone is next to the bed."

"Good. How is it in bed?"

"Good. Are you in bed?"

"Yes," I lied, and tried to right myself by dragging the phone by its cord as close I could to my bedroom.

"I'm in bed with you," she said.

"That's right," I said, "and I'm with you."

"I have the shades down, so it's dark and I don't see you."

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"I don't see you either."

"That was so nice, Neil."

"Yes, go to sleep, sweet, I'm here," and we hung up without goodbyes. In the morning, as planned, I called again, but I could hardly hear Brenda or myself for that matter, for Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max were going on a Workmen's Circle picnic in the afternoon, and there was some trouble about grape juice that had dripped all night from a jug in the refrigerator and by morning had leaked out onto the floor. Brenda was still in bed and so could play our game with some success, but I had to pull down all the shades of my senses to imagine myself beside her. I could only pray our nights and mornings would come, and soon enough they did.

IV

OVER the next week and a half there seemed to be only two people in my life: Brenda and the little colored kid who liked Gauguin. Every morning before the library opened the boy was waiting; sometimes he seated himself on the lion's back, sometimes under his belly, sometimes he just stood around throwing pebbles at his mane. Then he would come inside, tap around the main floor until Otto stared him up on tiptoes, and finally head up the long marble stairs that led to Tahiti. He did not always stay to lunchtime, but one very hot day he was there when I arrived in the morning and went through the door behind me when I left at night. The next morning, it was, that he did not show up, and as though in his place, a very old man appeared, white, smelling of lifesavers, his nose and jowls showing erupted veins beneath them. "Could you tell me where I'd find the art section?"

"Stack Three," I said.

In a few minutes, he returned with a big brown-covered book in his hand. He placed it on my desk, withdrew his card from a long moneyless billfold and waited for me to stamp the book.

"Do you want to take this book *out?*" I said.

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He smiled.

I took his card and jammed the metal edge into my machine, but I did not stamp down. "Just a minute," I said. I took a clipboard from under the desk and flipped through a few pages, upon which were games of battleship and ticktack-toe that I'd been playing through the week with myself. "I'm afraid there's a hold on this book."

"A what?"

"A hold. Someone's called up and asked that we hold it for them. Can I take your name and address and drop you a card when it's free..."

And so I was able, not without flushing once or twice, to get the book back in the stacks. When the colored kid showed up later in the day, it was just where he'd left it the afternoon before.

As for Brenda, I saw her every evening and when there was not a night game that kept Mr. Patimkin awake and in the TV room, or a Hadassah card party that sent Mrs. Patimkin out of the house and brought her in at unpredictable hours, we made love before the silent screen. One muggy, low-skied night Brenda took me swimming at the club. We were the only ones in the pool, and all the chairs, the cabanas, the lights, the diving boards, the very water seemed to exist only for our pleasure. She wore a blue suit that looked purple in the lights and down beneath the water it flashed sometimes green, sometimes black. Late in the evening a breeze came up off the golf course and we wrapped ourselves in one huge towel, pulled two chaise longues together, and despite the bartender, who was doing considerable pacing back and forth by the bar window, which overlooked the pool, we rested side by side on the chairs. Finally the bar light itself flipped off, and then, in a snap, the lights around the pool went down and out. My heart must have beat faster, or something, for Brenda seemed to guess my sudden doubt—*we should go*, I thought. She said:

"That's okay."

It was very dark, the sky was low and starless, and it took a while for me to see, once again, the diving board a shade lighter than the night, and to distinguish the water from the

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chairs that surrounded the far side of the pool.

I pushed the straps of her bathing suit down but she said no and rolled an inch away from me, and for the first time in the two weeks I'd known her she asked me a question about me.

"Where are your parents?" she said.

"Tuscon," I said, "Why?"

"My mother asked me."

I could see the life guard's chair now, white almost.

"Why are you still here? Why aren't you with them?" she asked.

"I'm not a child any more, Brenda," I said, more sharply than I'd intended. "I just can't go wherever my parents are."

"But then why do you stay with your aunt and uncle."

"They're not my parents."

"They're better?"

"No. Worse. I don't *know* why I stay with them."

"Why?" she said.

"Why don't I know?"

"Why do you stay? You do know, don't you?"

"My job, I suppose. It's convenient from there, and it's cheap, and it pleases my parents. My aunt's all right really... Do I really have to explain to your mother why I live where I do?"

"It's not for my mother. I want to know. I wondered why you weren't with your parents, that's all."

"Are you cold?" I asked.

"No."

"Do you want to go home?"

"No, not unless you do. Don't you feel well, Neil?"

"I feel all right," and to let her know that I was still me, I held her to me, though that moment I was without desire.

"Neil?"

"What?"

"What about the library?"

"Who wants to know that?"

"My father," she laughed.

"And you?"

She did not answer a moment. "And me," she said finally.

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"Well, what about it? Do I like it? It's okay. I sold shoes once and like the library better. After the Army they tried me out for a couple months with my uncle Aaron's real estate company—Doris' father—and I like the library better than that..."

"How did you get a job *there?*"

"I worked there for a little while when I was in college, then when I quit Uncle Aaron's, oh, I don't know..."

"What did you take in college?"

"At Newark Colleges of Rutgers University I majored in philosophy. I am 23 years old. I..."

"Why do you sound nasty again?"

"Do I?"

"Yes."

I didn't say I was sorry.

"Are you planning on making a career of the library?"

"Bren, I'm not planning anything. I haven't planned a thing in three years. At least for the year I've been out of the Army. In the Army I used to plan to go away weekends. I'm, I'm not a planner." After all the truth I'd suddenly given her, I shouldn't have ruined it for myself with that final lie. I added, "I'm a liver."

"I'm a pancreas," she said.

"I'm a—"

And she kissed the absurd game away: she wanted to be serious.

"Do you love me, Neil?"

I did not answer.

"I'll sleep with you whether you do or not, so tell me the truth."

"That was pretty crude."

"Don't be prissy," she said.

"No, I mean a crude thing to say about me."

"I don't understand," she said, and she didn't, and that she didn't pained me. I allowed myself the minor subterfuge, however, of forgiving Brenda her obtuseness. "Do you?" she said.

"No."

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"I want you to."

"What about the library?"

"What about it?" she said.

Was it obtuseness again? I thought not—and it wasn't, for Brenda said, "When you love me, there'll be nothing to worry about."

"Then of course I'll love you," I smiled.

"I know you will," she said. "Why don't you go in the water, and I'll wait for you and close my eyes, and when you come back you'll surprise me with the wet. Go ahead."

"You like games, don't you?"

"Go ahead. I'll close my eyes."

I walked down to the edge of the pool and dove in. The water felt colder than it had earlier, and when I broke through and was headed blindly down I felt a touch of panic. At the top again, I started to swim the length of the pool and then turned at the end and started back, but suddenly I was sure that when I left the water Brenda would be gone. I'd be alone in this damn place. I started for the side and pulled myself up and ran to the chairs and Brenda was there and I kissed her.

"God," she shivered, "You didn't stay long."

"I know."

"My turn," she said, and then she was up and a second later I heard a little crack of water and then nothing. Nothing for quite a while.

"Bren," I called softly. "Are you all right?" but no one answered.

I found her glasses on the chair beside me and held them in my hands. "Brenda?"

Nothing.

"Brenda?"

"No fair calling," she said and gave me her drenched self. "Your turn," she said.

This time I stayed below the water for a long while and when I surfaced again my lungs were ready to pop. I threw my head back for air and above me saw the sky, low like a hand pushing down, and I began to swim as though to move out from under its pressure. I wanted to get back to Brenda,

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for I worried once again—and there was no evidence, was there?—that if I stayed away too long she would not be there when I returned. I wished that I had carried her glasses away with me, so she would have to wait for me to lead her back home. I was having crazy thoughts, I knew, and yet they did not seem uncalled for in the darkness and strangeness of that place. Oh how I wanted to call out to her from the pool, but I knew she would not answer and I forced myself to swim the length a third time, and then a fourth, but midway through the fifth I felt a weird fright again, had momentary thoughts of my own extinction, and that time when I came back I held her tighter than either of us expected.

"Let go, let go," she laughed, "my turn—"

"But Brenda—"

But Brenda was gone and this time it seemed as though she'd never come back. I settled back and waited for the sun to dawn over the ninth hole, prayed it would if only for the comfort of its light, and when Brenda finally returned to me I would not let her go, and her cold wetness crept into me somehow and made me shiver. "That's it, Brenda. Please, no more games," I said, and then when I spoke again I held her so tightly I almost dug my body into hers. "I love you," I said, "I do."

So the summer went on. I saw Brenda every evening: we went swimming, we went for walks, we went for rides, up through the mountains so far and so long that by the time we started back the fog had begun to emerge from the trees and push out into the road and I would tighten my hands on the wheel and Brenda would put on her glasses and watch the white line for me. And we would eat—a few nights after my discovery of the fruit refrigerator Brenda led me to it herself. We would fill huge soup bowls with cherries, and in serving dishes for roast beef we would heap slices of watermelon. Then we would go up and out the back doorway of the basement and onto the back lawn and sit under the sporting goods tree, the light from TV room the only brightness we

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had out there. All we would hear for a while were just the two of us spitting pits. "I wish they would take root overnight and in the morning there'd just be watermelons and cherries."

"If they took root in this yard, sweetie, they'd grow refrigerators and Westinghouse Preferred. I'm not being nasty," I'd add quickly, and Brenda would laugh, and say she felt like a greengage plum, and I would disappear down into the basement and the cherry bowl would now be a greengage plum bowl, and then a nectarine bowl, and then a peach bowl, until, I have to admit it, I cracked my frail bowel, and would have to spend the following night, sadly, on the wagon. And then too we went out for corned beef sandwiches, pizza, beer and shrimp, ice cream sodas, and hamburgers. We went to the Lions Club Fair one night and Brenda won a Lions Club ashtray by shooting three baskets in a row. And when Ron came home from Milwaukee we went from time to time to see him play basketball in the semi-pro summer league, and it was those evenings that I felt a stranger with Brenda, for she knew all the players' names, and though for the most part they were gawky-limbed and dull, there was one named Luther Ferrari who was neither, and whom Brenda had dated for a whole year in high school. He was Ron's closest friend and I remembered his name from the *Newark News*: he was one of the great Ferrari brothers, All State all of them in at least two sports. It was Ferrari who called Brenda, Buck, a nickname which apparently went back to her ribbon-winning days. Like Ron, Ferrari was exceedingly polite, as though it were some affliction of those over six feet three. He was gentlemanly towards me and gentle towards Brenda, and after a while I balked when the suggestion was made that we go to see Ron play. And then one night we discovered that at eleven o' clock the cashier at the Hilltop Theatre went home and the manager disappeared into his office, and so that summer we saw the last quarter of at least fifteen movies, and then when we were driving home—driving Brenda home, that is—we would try to re-construct the beginnings of the film. Our

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favorite last quarter of a movie that summer was *Ma and Pa Kettle In The City*, our favorite fruit, greengage plums, and our favorite, our only, people, each other. Of course we ran into others from time to time, some of Brenda's friends, and occasionally, one or two of mine. One night in August we even went to a bar out on Route 6 with Laura Simpson Stolowitch and her fiancé, but it was a dreary evening. Brenda and I seemed untrained in talking to others, and so we danced a good deal, which we realized was one thing we'd never done before. Laura's boy friend drank stingers pompously and Simp—Brenda wanted me to call her Stolo but I didn't—Simp drank a tepid combination of something like ginger ale and soda. Whenever we returned to the table, Simp would be talking about "the dance" and her fiancé about "the film", until finally Brenda asked him "Which film?" and then we danced till closing time. And when we went back to Brenda's we filled a bowl with cherries which we carried into the TV room and ate sloppily for a while; and later, on the sofa, we loved each other and when I moved from the darkened room to the bathroom I could always feel cherry pits against my bare soles. At home, undressing for the second time that night, I would find red marks on the underside of my feet.

And how did her parents take all of this? Mrs. Patimkin continued to smile at me and Mr. Patimkin continued to think I ate like a bird. When invited to dinner I would, for his benefit, eat twice what I wanted, but the truth seemed to be that after he'd characterized my appetite that first time, he never really bothered to look again. I might have eaten ten times my normal amount, have finally killed myself with food, he would still have considered me not a man but a sparrow. No one seemed distressed by my presence, though Julie had cooled considerably; consequently, when Brenda suggested to her father that at the end of August I spend a week of my vacation at the Patimkin house, he pondered a moment, decided on the five iron, made his approach shot, and said yes. And when she passed on to her mother the decision of Patimkin Sink, there wasn't much Mrs. Patimkin could do.

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So, through Brenda's craftiness I was invited.

On that Friday morning that was to be my last day of work, my Aunt Gladys saw me packing my bag and she asked where I was going. I told her. She did not answer and I thought I saw awe in those red-rimmed hysterical eyes—I had come a long way since that day she'd said to me on the phone, "Fancy-shmansy."

"How long you going, I should know how to shop I wouldn't buy too much. You'll leave me with a refrigerator full of milk it'll go bad it'll stink up the refrigerator—"

"A week," I said.

"A *week?*" she said. "They got room for a week?"

"Aunt Gladys, they don't live over the store."

"I lived over a store I wasn't ashamed. Thank God we always had a roof. We never went begging in the streets," she told me as I packed the Bermudas I'd just bought, "and your cousin Susan we'll put through college, Uncle Max should live and be well. We didn't send her away to camp for August, she doesn't have shoes when she wants them, sweaters she doesn't have a drawerful—"

"I didn't say anything, Aunt Gladys."

"You don't get enough to eat here? You leave over sometimes I show your Uncle Max your plate, it's a shame. A child in Europe could make a four course meal from what you leave over."

"Aunt Gladys," I went over to her. "I get everything I want here. I'm just taking a vacation. Don't I deserve a vacation?"

She held herself to me and I could feel her trembling. "I told your mother I would take care of her Neil she shouldn't worry. And now you go running—"

I put my arms around her and kissed her on the top of her head. "C'mon," I said. "you're being silly. I'm not running away. I'm just going away for a week, on a vacation."

"You'll leave their telephone number God forbid you should get sick."

"Okay."

"Millburn they live?"

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"Short Hills. I'll leave the number."

"Since when do Jewish people live in Short Hills? They couldn't be real Jews believe me."

"They're real Jews," I said.

"I'll see it I'll believe it." She wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron just as I was zipping up the sides of the suitcase. "Don't close the bag yet. I'll make a little package with some fruit in it, you'll take with you."

"Okay, Aunt Gladys," and on the way to work that morning, I ate the orange and the two peaches that she'd put in a bag for me.

A few hours later Mr. Scapello informed me that when I returned from my vacation after Labor Day, I would be hoisted up onto Martha Winney's stool. He himself, he said, had made the same move some twelve years ago, and so it appeared that if I could manage to maintain my balance I might someday be Mr. Scapello. I would also get an eight dollar increase in salary which was five dollars more than the increase Mr. Scapello had received years before. He shook my hand and then started back up the long flight of marble stairs, his behind barging against his suit jacket like a hoop. No sooner had he left my side than I smelled spearment and looked up to see the old man with veiny nose and jowls.

"Hello young man," he said pleasantly. "Is my book back?"

"What book?"

"The Gauguin. I was shopping and I thought I'd stop by to ask. I haven't gotten the card yet. It's two weeks already."

"No," I said, and as I spoke I saw that Mr. Scapello had stopped midway up the stairs and turned as though he'd forgotten to tell me something. "Look," I said to the old man, "it should be back any day." I said it with a finality that bordered on rudeness, and I alarmed myself, for suddenly I saw what would happen: the old man making a fuss; Mr. Scapello gliding down the stairs, Mr. Scapello scampering up; Scapello scandalized, Scapello profuse, Scapello presiding

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at the ascension of John McKee to Miss Winney's stool. I turned to the old man, "Why don't you leave your phone number and I'll try to get hold of it this afternoon—" but my attempt at concern and courtesy came too late, and the man growled some words about public servants, a letter to the Mayor, snotty kids, and left the library, thank God, only a second before Mr. Scapello returned to my desk to remind me that everyone was chipping in for a present for Miss Winney and that if I liked I should leave a half dollar on his desk during the day.

After lunch the colored kid came in. When he headed past the desk for the stairs, I called over to him. "Come here," I said. "Where are you going?"

"The heart section."

"What book are you reading?"

"That Mr. Go-again's book. Look, man, I ain't doing nothing wrong. I didn't do *no* writing in *any*thing. You could search me—"

"I know you didn't. Listen, if you like that book so much why don't you please take it home. Do you have a library card?"

"No, sir, I didn't taken *nothing*."

"No, a library card is what we give to you so you can take books home. Then you won't have to come down here everyday. Do you go to school?"

"Yes, sir. Miller Street School. But this here's summertime. It's okay I'm not in school. I ain't *supposed* to be in school."

"I know. As long as you go to school you can *have* a library card. You could take the book home."

"What you keep telling me take that book home for? At home somebody dee-*stroy* it."

"You could hide it someplace, in a desk—"

"Man," he said, squinting at me, "why don't you want me to come round here?"

"I didn't say you shouldn't."

"I *likes* to come here. I likes them stairs."

"I like them too," I said. "But the trouble is that someday somebody's going to take that book out."

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He smiled. "Don't you worry," he said to me. "Ain't nobody done that yet," and he tapped off to the stairs and Stack Three.

Did I perspire that day! It was the coolest of the summer, but when I left work in the evening my shirt was sticking to my back. In the car I opened my bag, and while the rush-hour traffic flowed down Washington Street, I huddled in the back of the car and changed into a clean shirt so that when I reached Short Hills I'd look as though I was deserving of an interlude in the suburbs. However, driving up Central Avenue I could not keep my mind on my vacation, or for that matter, on my driving: to the distress of pedestrians and motorists, I ground gears, overshot crosswalks, hesitated at green and red lights alike. I kept thinking that while I was on vacation that jowly bastard would return to the library, that the colored kid's book would disappear, that my new job would be taken away from me, that, in fact my old job—but then why should I worry about all that: the library wasn't going to be *my* life.

V

"RON'S getting married!" Julie screamed at me when I came through the door. "Ron's getting married!"

"Now?" I said.

"Labor Day! He's marrying Harriet, he's marrying Harriet." She began to sing it like a jump-rope song, nasal and rhythmic. "I'm going to be a sister-in-law!"

"Hi," Brenda said, "I'm going to be a sister-in-law."

"So I hear. When did it happen?"

"This afternoon he told us. They spoke long distance for forty minutes last night. She's flying here next week, and there's going to be a *huge* wedding. My parents are flittering all over the place. They've got to arrange everything in about day or two. And my father's taking Ron in the business—he's going to have to start at two hundred a week and then work himself up. That'll take till October."

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"I thought he was going to be a gym teacher."

"He was. But now he has responsibilities..."

And at dinner Ron expanded on the subject of responsibilities.

"We're going to have a boy," he said, to his mother's delight, "and when he's about six months old I'm going to sit him down with a basketball in front of him, and a football, and a baseball, and then whichever one he reaches for, that's the one we're going to concentrate on."

"Suppose he doesn't reach for any of them," Brenda said.

"Don't be funny, young lady," Mrs. Patimkin said.

"I'm going to be an aunt," Julie sang, and she stuck her tongue out at Brenda.

"When is Harriet coming?" Mr. Patimkin breathed through a mouthful of potatoes.

"A week from yesterday."

"Can she sleep in my room?" Julie cried. "*Can* she?"

"No, the guest room—" Mrs. Patimkin began, but then she remembered me— with a crushing side glance from those purple eyes, and said, "Of course."

Well, I did eat like a bird. After dinner my bag was carried—by me—up to the guest room which was across from Ron's room and right down the hall from Brenda. Brenda came along to show me the way.

"Let me see your bed, Bren."

"Later," she said.

"Can we? Up here?"

"I think so," she said. "Ron sleeps like a log."

"Can I stay the night?"

"I don't know."

"I could get up early and come back in here. We'll set the alarm."

"It'll wake everybody up."

"I'll remember to get up. I can do it."

"I better not stay up here with you too long," she said. "My mother'll have a fit. I think she's nervous about your being here."

"So am I. I hardly know them. Do you think I should really stay a whole week?"

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"A whole week? Once Harriet gets here it'll be so chaotic you can probably stay two months."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Do you want me to?"

"Yes," she said, and went down the stairs so as to ease her mother's conscience.

I unpacked my bag and dropped my clothes into a drawer that was empty except for a packet of dress shields and a high school yearbook. In the middle of my unpacking, Ron came clunking up the stairs.

"Hi," he called into my room.

"Congratulations," I called back. I should have realized that any word of ceremony would provoke a handshake from Ron; he interrupted whatever it was he was about to do in his room, and came into mine.

"Thanks." He pumped me. "Thanks."

Then he sat down on my bed and watched me as I finished unpacking. I have one shirt with a Brooks Brothers label and I let it linger on the bed a while; the Arrows I heaped in the drawer. Ron sat there rubbing his forearm and grinning. After awhile I was thoroughly unsettled by the silence.

"Well," I said, "that's something."

He agreed, to *what* I don't know.

"How does it feel?" I asked, after another longer silence.

"Better. Ferrari smacked it under the boards."

"Oh. Good," I said. "How does getting married feel?"

"Ah, okay, I guess."

I leaned against the bureau and counted stitches in the carpet.

Ron finally risked a journey into language. "Do you know anything about music?" he asked.

"Something, yes."

"You can listen to my phonograph if you want."

"Thanks, Ron. I didn't know you were interested in music."

"Sure. I got all the André Kostelanetz records ever made. You like Mantovani? I got all of him too. I like semi-classical

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a lot. You can hear my Columbus record if you want..." he dwindled off. Finally he shook my hand and left.

Downstairs I could hear Julie singing. "I'm going to be an a-a-aunt," and Mrs. Patimkin saying to her, "No, honey, you're going to be a sister-in-law. Sing that, sweetheart," but Julie continued to sing, "I'm going to be an a-a-aunt," and then I heard Brenda's voice joining hers, singing, "We're going to be an a-a-aunt," and then Julie joined that, and finally Mrs. Patimkin called to Mr. Patimkin, "Will you make her stop encouraging her..." and soon the duet ended.

And then I heard Mrs. Patimkin again. I couldn't make out the words but Brenda answered her. Their voices grew louder; finally I could hear perfectly. "I need a houseful of company at a time like this?" It was Mrs. Patimkin. "I asked you, Mother." "You asked your father. I'm the one you should have asked first. He doesn't know how much extra work this is for me..." "My God, Mother, you'd think we didn't have Carlota and Jenny." "Carlota and Jenny can't do everything. This is not the Salvation Army!" "What the hell does that mean?" "Watch your tongue, young lady. That may be very well for your College friends." "Oh, *stop* it, Mother!" "Don't raise your voice to me. When's the last time you lifted a finger to help around here?" "I'm not a slave... I'm a daughter." "You ought to learn what a day's work means.""Why?" Brenda said. "*Why?*""Because you're lazy," Mrs. Patimkin answered, "and you think the world owes you a living." "Whoever said *that?*" "You ought to earn some money and buy your own clothes." "Why? Good God, Mother, Daddy could live off the stocks alone, for God's sake. What are you complaining about?" "When's the last time you washed the dishes!" "Jesus Christ!" Brenda flared, "Carlota washes the dishes!" "Don't Jesus Christ me!" "Oh, Mother!" and Brenda was crying. "Why the hell are you like this!" "That's it," Mrs. Patimkin said, "cry in front of your company..." "My *company*..." Brenda weeped, "why don't you go yell at him too... why is everyone so nasty to me..."

From across the hall I heard André Kostelanetz let several

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thousand singing violins loose on *Night and Day*. Ron's door was open and I saw he was stretched out, colossal, in his bed; he was singing along with the record. The words belonged to *Night and Day*, but I didn't recognize Ron's tune. In a minute he picked up the phone and asked the operator for a Milwaukee number. While she connected him, he rolled over and turned up the volume on the record player, so that it would carry the 900 miles west.

I heard Julie downstairs. "Ha, ha, Brenda's crying, ha ha, Brenda's crying."

And then Brenda was running up the stairs. "Your day'll come, you little bastard!" she called.

"*Brenda!*" Mrs. Patimkin called.

"*Mommy!*" Julie cried. "Brenda cursed at me!"

"What's going *on* here!" Mr. Patimkin shouted.

"You call *me*, Mrs. P?" Carlota shouted.

And Ron, in the other room, said, "Hello, Har, I told them..."

I sat down on my Brooks Brothers shirt and pronounced my own name out loud.

"Goddam her!" Brenda said to me as she paced up and down my room.

"Bren, do you think I should go—"

"Shhh..." She went to the door of my room and listened. "They're going visiting, thank God."

"Brenda—"

"Shhh... They've gone."

"Julie too?"

"Yes," she said. "Is Ron in his room? His door is closed."

"He went out."

"You can't hear anybody move around here. They all creep around in *sneakers*. Oh Neil."

"Bren, I asked you, maybe I should just stay through tomorrow and then go."

"It isn't you she's angry about."

"I'm not helping any."

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"It's Ron, really. That he's getting married just has her flipped. And me. Now with that goody-good Harriet around, she'll just forget I even exist."

"Isn't that okay with you?"

She walked off to the window and looked outside. It was dark and cool; the trees rustled and flapped as though they were sheets that had been hung out to dry. Everything outside hinted at September, and for the first time I realized how close we were to Brenda's departure for school.

"Is it, Bren?" but she was not listening to me.

She walked across the room to a door at the far end of the room. She opened it.

"I thought that was a closet," I said.

"Come here."

She held the door back and when we leaned into the darkness we could hear the strange wind hissing in the eaves of the house.

"What's in here?" I said.

"Money."

Brenda went into the room. When the puny 60 watt bulb was twisted on I saw that the place was full of old furniture—two wing chairs with hair-oil lines at the back, a sofa with a paunch in its middle, a bridge table, two bridge chairs with their stuffing showing, a mirror whose backing had peeled off, shadeless lamps, lampless shades, a coffee table with a cracked glass top, and a pile of rolled up shades.

"What is this?" I said.

"A storeroom. Our old furniture."

"How old?"

"From Newark," she said. "Come here." She was on her hands and knees in front of the sofa and was holding up its paunch to peek beneath.

"Brenda, what the hell are we doing here? You're getting filthy."

"It's not here."

"*What?*"

"The money. I told you."

I sat down on a wing chair, raising some dust. It had begun

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to rain outside, and we could smell the fall dampness coming through the vent that was outlined at the far end of the storeroom. Brenda got up from the floor and sat down on the sofa. Her knees and Bermudas were dirty, and when she pushed her hair back she dirtied her forehead. There among the disarrangement and dirt I had the strange experience of seeing us, *both* of us, placed among disarrangement and dirt: we looked like a young couple who had just moved into a new apartment; we had suddenly taken stock of our furniture, finances, and future, and all we could feel any pleasure about was the clean smell of outside, which reminded us we were alive, but which, in a pinch, would not feed us.

"What money?" I said again.

"The hundred dollar bills. From when I was a little girl..." and she breathed deeply. "When I was a little girl and we'd just moved from Newark, my father took me up here one day. He took me into this room and told me that if anything should ever happen to him, he wanted me to know where there was some money that I should have. He said it wasn't for anybody else but me, and that I should never tell anyone about it, not even Ron. Or my mother."

"How much was it?"

"Three hundred dollar bills. I'd never seen them before. I was nine, around Julie's age. I don't think we'd been living here a month. I remember, I used to come up here about once a week, when no one was home but Carlota, and crawl under the sofa and make sure it was still here. And it always was. He never mentioned it once again. Never."

"Where is it? Maybe someone stole it."

"I don't know, Neil. I suppose he took it back."

"When it was gone," I said, "my God, didn't you tell him? Maybe Carlota—"

"I never knew it was gone, until just now. I guess I stopped looking at one time or another... And then I forgot about it. Or just didn't think about it. I mean I always had enough, I didn't need this. I guess one day *he* figured I wouldn't need it."

Brenda paced up to the narrow, dust-covered window and drew her initials on it.

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"Why did you want it now?" I said.

"I don't know..." she said and went over and twisted the bulb off.

I didn't move from the chair and Brenda, in her tight shorts and shirt, seemed naked standing there a few feet away. Then I saw her shoulders shaking. "I wanted to find it and tear it up in little pieces and put the goddam pieces in her purse! If it was there, I swear it, I would have done it."

"I wouldn't have let you, Bren."

"Wouldn't you have?"

"No."

"Make love to me, Neil. Right now."

"Where?"

"Do it! *Here.* On this cruddy cruddy cruddy sofa."

And I obeyed her.

The next morning Brenda made breakfast for the two of us. Ron had gone off to his first day of work—I'd heard him singing in the shower only an hour after I'd returned to my own room; in fact, I had still been awake when the Chrysler had pulled out of the garage, carrying boss and son down to the Patimkin works in Newark. Mrs. Patimkin wasn't home either; she had taken her car and had gone off to the Temple to talk to Rabbi Kranitz about the wedding. Julie was on the back lawn playing at helping Carlota hang the clothes.

"You know what I want to do this morning?" Brenda said. We were eating a grapefruit, sharing it rather sloppily, for Brenda couldn't find a paring knife, and so we'd decided to peel it down like an orange and eat the segments separately.

"What?" I said.

"Run," she said. "Do you ever run?"

"You mean on a track? God, yes. In high school we had to run a mile every month. So we wouldn't be Momma's boys the gym teacher said. I think the bigger your lungs get the more you're supposed to hate your mother."

"I want to run," she said, "and I want you to run. Okay?"

"Oh, Brenda..."

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But an hour later, after a breakfast that consisted of another grapefruit, which apparently is all a runner is supposed to eat in the morning, we had driven the Volkswagen over to the high school, behind which was a quarter mile track. Some kids were playing with a dog out in the grassy center of the track, and at the far end, near the woods, a figure in white shorts with slits in the side, and no shirt, was twirling, twirling, and then flinging a shot put as far as he could. After it left his hand he did a little eagle-eyed tap dance while he watched it arch and bend and land in the distance.

"You know," Brenda said, "you look like me. Except bigger."

We were dressed similarly, sneakers, sweat socks, khaki Bermudas, and sweat shirts, but I had the feeling that Brenda was not talking about the accidents of our dress—if they were accidents. She meant, I was sure, that I was somehow beginning to look the way she wanted me to. Like herself.

"Let's see who's faster," she said, and we started along the track. Within the first eighth of a mile the three little boys and their dog were following us. As we passed the corner where the shot putter was, he waved at us; Brenda called "Hi!" and I smiled, which as you may or may not know, makes one engaged in serious running feel inordinately silly. At the quarter mile the kids dropped off and retired to the grass, the dog turned and started the other way, and I had a tiny knife in my side. Still I was abreast of Brenda, who as we started on the second lap, called "Hi!" once again to the lucky shot putter, who was reclining on the grass now, watching us, and rubbing his shot like a crystal ball. Ah, I thought, there's the sport.

"How about us throwing the shot put?" I panted.

"After," she said, and I saw beads of sweat clinging to the last strands of hair that shagged off her ear. When we approached the half mile Brenda suddenly swerved off the track onto the grass and tumbled down; her departure surprised me and I was still running.

"Hey, Bob Mathias," she called, "let's lie in the sun..." I acted as though I didn't hear her and though my heart pounded

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in my throat and my mouth was dry as a drought, I made my legs move, and swore I would not stop until I'd finished one more lap. As I passed the shot-putter for the third time, I called "Hi!"

She was excited when I finally pulled up alongside of her. "You're good," she said. My hands were on my hips and I was looking at the ground and sucking air—rather, air was sucking me, I didn't have much to say about it.

"Uh-huh," I breathed.

"Let's do this every morning," she said. "We'll get up and have two grapefruit, and then you'll come out here and run. I'll time you. In two weeks you'll break four minutes, won't you sweetie? I'll get Ron's stop watch." She was so excited—she'd slid over on the grass and was pushing my socks up against my wet ankles and calves. She bit my knee-cap.

"Okay," I said.

"Then we'll go back and have a real breakfast."

"Okay."

"You drive back," she said, and suddenly she was up and running ahead of me, and then we were headed back in the car.

And the next morning, my mouth still edgey from the grapefruit segments, we were at the track. We had Ron's stop watch and a towel for me, for when I was finished.

"My legs are a little sore," I said.

"Do some exercises," Brenda said. "I'll do them with you." She heaped the towel on the grass and together we did deep kneebends, and sit-ups, and push-ups, and some high-knee raising in place. I felt overwhelmingly happy.

"I'm just going to run a half today, Bren. We'll see what I do..." and I heard Brenda click the watch, and then when I was on the farside of the track, the clouds trailing above me like my own white, fleecy tail, I saw that Brenda was on the ground, hugging her knees, and alternately checking the watch and looking out at me. We were the only ones there, and it all reminded me of one of those scenes in race horse movies, where an old trainer like Walter Brennan and a young handsome man clock the beautiful young girl's horse in the

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early Kentucky morning to see if it really is the fastest two year old alive. There were differences all right—one being simply that at the quarter mile Brenda shouted out to me, "One minute and fourteen seconds," but it was pleasant and exciting and clean and when I was finished Brenda was standing up and waiting for me. Instead of a tape to break I had Brenda's sweet flesh to meet, and I did, and it was the first time she said that she loved me.

We ran—I ran—every morning, and by the end of the week I was running a 7:02 mile, and always at the end there was the little click of the watch and Brenda's arms.

At night, I would read in my pajamas, while Brenda, in her room, read, and we would wait for Ron to go to sleep. Some nights we had to wait longer than others, and I would hear the leaves swishing outside, for it had grown cooler at the end of August, and the air-conditioning was turned off at night and we were all allowed to open our windows. Finally Ron would be ready for bed. He would stomp around his room and then he would come to the door in his shorts and T-shirt and go into the bathroom where he would urinate loudly and brush his teeth. After he brushed his teeth I would go in to brush mine. We would pass in the hall and I would give him a hearty and sincere, "Goodnight". Once in the bathroom, I would spend a moment admiring my tan in the mirror; behind me I could see Ron's jock-straps hanging out to dry on the Hot and Cold knobs of the shower. Nobody ever questioned their tastefulness as adornment, and after a few nights I didn't even notice them.

While Ron brushed his teeth, and I waited in my bed for my turn, I could hear the record player going in his room. Generally, after coming in from basketball, he would call Harriet—who was now only a few days away from us—and then would lock himself up with *Sports Illustrated* and Mantovani; however, when he emerged from his room for his evening toilet, it was not a Mantovani record I would hear playing, but something else, apparently what he'd once referred to as his Columbus record. I *imagined* that was what I heard, for I could not tell much from the last moments of

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sound. All I heard were bells moaning evenly and soft patriotic music behind them, and riding over it all, a deep kind of Edward R. Murrow gloomy voice: "*And so goodbye, Columbus,*" the voice intoned, "*...goodbye, Columbus... goodbye...*" Then there would be silence and Ron would be back in his room. The light would switch off and in only a few minutes I would hear him rumbling down into that exhilarating, restorative, vitamin-packed, dreamless sleep that I imagined athletes to enjoy.

One morning near sneaking-away time I had a dream and when I awakened from it there was just enough dawn coming into the room for me to see the color of Brenda's hair. I touched her in her sleep for the dream had unsettled me: it had taken place on a ship, an old sailing ship like those you see in pirate movies. With me on the ship was the little colored kid from the library—I was the captain and he my mate, and we were the only crew members. For a while it was a pleasant dream; we were anchored in the harbor of an island in the Pacific and it was very sunny. Up on the beach there were beautiful bare-skinned Negresses, and none of them moved; but suddenly *we* were moving, our ship, out of the harbor, and the Negresses moved slowly down to the shore and began to throw leis at us and say, "Goodbye, Columbus... goodbye, Columbus... goodbye..." and though we did not want to go, the little boy and I, the boat was moving and there was nothing we could do about it. He shouted at me that it was my fault and I shouted it was his for not having a library card, but we were wasting our breath, for we were further and further from the island, and soon the natives were nothing at all. Space was all out of proportion in the dream, and things were sized and squared in no way I'd ever seen before, and I think it was that more than anything else that steered me into consciousness. I did not want to leave Brenda's side that morning, and for a while I played with the little point at the nape of her neck, where she'd had her hair cut. I stayed longer than I should have, and when finally I returned to my room I almost ran into Ron who was preparing for his day at Patimkin Kitchen and Bathroom Sinks.

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VI

THAT morning was supposed to have been my last at the Patimkin house; however, when I began to throw my things into my bag late in the day, Brenda told me I could unpack—somehow she'd managed to inveigle another week out of her parents, and I would be able to stay right through till Labor Day, when Ron would be married; then, the following morning Brenda would be off to school and I would go back to work. So we would be with each other until the summer's last moment.

This should have made me overjoyed, but as Brenda trotted back down the stairs to accompany her family to the airport—where they were to pick up Harriet—I was not joyful but disturbed, as I had been more and more with the thought that when Brenda went back to Radcliffe, that would be the end for me. I was convinced that even Miss Winney's stool was not high enough for me to see clear up to Boston. Nevertheless, I tossed my clothing back into the drawer and was able, finally, to tell myself that there'd been no hints of ending our affair from Brenda, and any suspicions I had, any uneasiness, was spawned in my own uncertain heart. Then I went into Ron's room to call my aunt.

"Hello?" she said.

"Aunt Gladys," I said, "how are you?"

"You're sick."

"No, I'm having a fine time. I wanted to call you, I'm going to stay another week."

"Why?"

"I told you. I'm having a good time. Mrs. Patimkin asked me to stay until Labor Day."

"You've got clean underwear?"

"I'm washing it at night. I'm okay, Aunt Gladys."

"By hand you can't get it clean."

"It's clean enough. Look, Aunt Gladys, I'm having a wonderful time."

"*Shmutz* he lives in and I shouldn't worry."

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"How's Uncle Max?" I asked.

"What should he be? Uncle Max is Uncle Max. You, I don't like the way your voice sounds."

"Why? Do I sound like I've got on dirty underwear?"

"Smart guy. Someday you'll learn."

"What?"

"What do you mean *what?* You'll find out. You'll stay there too long you'll be too good for us."

"Never, sweetheart," I said.

"I'll see it I'll believe it."

"Is it cool in Newark, Aunt Gladys?"

"It's snowing," she said.

"Hasn't it been cool all week?"

"You sit around all day it's cool. For me it's not February, believe me."

"Okay, Aunt Gladys. Say hello to everybody."

"You got a letter from your mother."

"Good. I'll read it when I get home."

"You couldn't take a ride down you'll read it?"

"It'll wait. I'll drop them a note. Be a good girl," I said.

"What about your socks?"

"I go barefoot. Goodbye, honey." And I hung up.

Down in the kitchen Carlota was getting dinner ready. I was always amazed at how Carlota's work never seemed to get in the way of her life. She made household chores seem like illustrative gestures of whatever it was she was singing, even if, as now, it was, "*I Get a Kick Out of You.*" She moved from the oven to the automatic dish washer—she pushed buttons, turned dials, peeked in the glass-doored oven, and from time to time picked a big black grape out of a bunch that lay on the sink. She chewed and chewed, humming all the time, and then, with a deliberated casualness, shot the skin and the pit directly into the garbage disposal unit. I said hello to her as I went out the back door, and though she did not return the greeting, I felt a kinship with one, who like me, had been partially wooed and won on Patimkin fruit.

Out on the lawn I shot baskets for a while; then I picked

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up an iron and drove a cotton golf ball limply up into the sunlight; then I kicked a soccer ball towards the oak tree; then I tried shooting foul shots again. Nothing diverted me—I felt open-stomached, as though I hadn't eaten for months, and though I went back inside and came out with my own handful of grapes, the feeling continued, and I knew it had nothing to do with my caloric intake; it was only a rumor of the hollowness that would come when Brenda was away. That fact of her departure had, of course, been on my mind for a while, but overnight it had taken on a darker hue. Curiously, the darkness seemed to have something to do with Harriet, Ron's intended, and I thought for a time that it was simply the reality of Harriet's arrival that had dramatized the passing of time; we had been talking about it and now suddenly it was here—just as Brenda's departure would be here before we knew it. But it was more than that: the union of Harriet and Ron reminded me that separation need not be a permanent state. People could marry each other, even if they were young! And yet Brenda and I had never mentioned marriage, except perhaps for that night at the pool when she'd said, "When you love me, everything will be all right." Well, I loved her, and she me, and things didn't seem all right at all. Or was I inventing troubles again? I supposed I should really have thought my lot improved considerably: yet, there on the lawn, the August sky seemed too beautiful and temporary to bear, and I wanted Brenda to marry me. Marriage, though, was not what I proposed to her when she drove the car up the driveway, alone, some fifteen minutes later. That proposal would have taken a kind of courage that I did not think I had. I did not feel myself prepared for any answer but, "Halleluljah?" Any other kind of yes wouldn't have satisfied me, and any kind of no, even one masked behind the words, "Let's wait, sweetheart," would have been my end. So I imagine that's why I proposed the surrogate, which turned out finally to be far more daring than I knew it to be at the time.

"Harriet's plane is late, so I drove home," Brenda called. "Where's everyone else?"

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"They're going to wait for her and have dinner at the airport. I have to tell Carlota," and she went inside.

In a few minutes she appeared on the porch. She wore a yellow dress that cut a wide-bottomed U across her shoulders and neck, and showed where the tanned flesh began above her breasts. On the lawn she stepped out of her heels and walked barefoot over to where I was sitting under the oak tree.

"Women who wear high heels all the time get tipped ovaries," she said.

"Who told you that?"

"I don't remember. I like to think everything's ship-shape in there."

"Brenda, I want to ask you something..."

She yanked the blanket with the big "O" on it over to us and sat down.

"What?" she said.

"I know this is out of the blue, though really it's not... I want you to buy a diaphragm. To go to a doctor and get one."

She smiled. "Don't worry, sweetie, we're careful. Everything is okay."

"But that's the safest."

"We're safe. It'd be a waste."

"Why take chances?"

"But we *aren't*. How many things do you need."

"Honey, it isn't bulk I'm interested in. It's not even safety," I added.

"You just want me to own one, is that it? Like a walking stick, or a pith helmet—"

"Brenda, I want you to own one for... for the sake of pleasure."

"Pleasure? Whose? The doctor's?"

"Mine," I said.

She did not answer me, but rubbed her fingers along the ridge of her collarbone to wipe away the tiny globes of perspiration that had suddenly formed there.

"No, Neil, it's silly."

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"Why?"

"Why? It just is."

"You know why it's silly, Brenda—because *I* asked you to do it?"

"That's sillier."

"If you asked *me* to buy a diaphragm we'd have to go straight to the yellow pages and find a gynecologist open on Saturday afternoon."

"I would never ask you to do that, baby."

"It's the truth," I said, though I was smiling. "It's the truth."

"It's not," she said, and got up and walked over to the basketball court, where she walked on the white lines that Mr. Patimkin had laid the day before.

"Come back here," I said.

"Neil, it's silly and I don't want to talk about it."

"Why are you being so selfish?"

"Selfish? You're the one who's being selfish. It's *your* pleasure..."

"That's right. My pleasure. Why not!"

"Don't raise your voice Carlota."

"Then get the hell over here," I said.

She walked over to me, leaving white foot prints on the grass. 'I didn't think you were such a creature of the flesh," she said.

"Didn't you?" I said. "I'll tell you something that you ought to know. It's not even the pleasures of the flesh I'm talking about."

"Then frankly. I don't know *what* you're talking about. Why you're even bothering. Isn't what we use sufficient?"

"I'm bothering just because I want you to go to a doctor and get a diaphragm. That's all. No explanation. Just do it. Do it because I asked you to."

"You're not being reasonable—"

"Goddamit, Brenda!"

"Goddamit yourself!" she said and went up into the house.

I closed my eyes and leaned back and in fifteen minutes, or

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maybe less, I heard somebody stroking at the cotton golf ball. She had changed into shorts and a blouse and was still barefoot.

We didn't speak with each other, but I watched her bring the club back of her ear, and then swing through, her chin tilted up with the line of flight a regular golf-ball would have taken.

"That's five hundred yards," I said.

She didn't answer but walked after the cotton ball and then readied for another swing.

"Brenda. Please come here."

She walked over, dragging the club over the grass.

"What?"

"I don't want to argue with you."

"Nor I with you," she said. "It was the first time."

"Was it such an awful thing for me to ask?"

She nodded.

"Bren, I know it was probably a surprise. It was for me. But we're not children."

"Neil, I just don't want to. It's not because you asked me to, either. I don't know where you get that from. That's not it."

"Then why is it?"

"Oh everything. I just don't feel *old* enough for all that equipment."

"What does age have to do with it?"

"I don't mean age. I just mean—well, *me*. I mean it's so conscious a thing to do."

"Of course it's conscious. That's exactly it. Don't you see? It would change us."

"It would change me."

"Us. Together."

"Neil, how do you think I'd feel lying to some doctor."

"You can go to Margaret Sanger, in New York. They don't ask any questions."

"You've done this before?"

"No," I said. "I just know. I read Mary McCarthy."

"That's exactly right. That's just what I'd feel like, somebody out of *her*."

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"Don't be dramatic," I said.

"You're the one who's being dramatic. You think there would be something affairish about it, then. Last summer I went with this whore who I sent out to buy—"

"Oh Brenda, you're a selfish egotistical bitch! You're the one who's thinking about 'last summer', about an end for us. In fact, that's the whole thing, isn't it—"

"That's right. I'm a bitch. I want this to end. That's why I ask you to stay another week, that's why I let you sleep with me in my own house. What's the *matter* with you! Why don't you and my mother take turns—one day she can plague me, the next you—"

"Stop it!"

"Go to hell, all of you!" Brenda said, and now she was crying and I knew when she ran off I would not see her, as I didn't, for the rest of the afternoon.

Harriet Ehrlich impressed me as a young lady singularly unconscious of a motive in others or herself. All was surfaces, and she seemed a perfect match for Ron, and too for the Patimkins. Mrs. Patimkin, in fact, did just as Brenda prophesied. Harriet appeared, and Brenda's mother lifted one wing and pulled the girl in towards the warm underpart of her body, where Brenda herself would have liked to nestle. Harriet was built like Brenda, although a little chestier, and she nodded her head insistently whenever anyone spoke. Sometimes she would even say the last few words of your sentence with you, though that was infrequent; for the most part she nodded and kept her hands folded. All evening, as the Patimkins planned where the newly-weds should live, what furniture they should buy, how soon they should have a baby—all through this I kept thinking that Harriet was wearing white gloves, but she wasn't.

Brenda and I did not exchange a word or a glance; we sat, listening, Brenda somewhat more impatient than me. Near the end Harriet began calling Mrs. Patimkin "Mother", and once, "Mother Patimkin", and that was when Brenda went

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to sleep. I stayed behind, mesmerized almost by the dissection, analysis, reconsideration, and finally, the embracing of the trivial. At last Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin tumbled off to bed, and Julie, who had fallen asleep on her chair, was carried into her room by Ron. That left us two non-Patimkins together.

"Ron tells me you have a very interesting job."

"I work in the library."

"I've always liked reading."

"That'll be nice, married to Ron."

"Ron likes music."

"Yes." I said. What had I *said?*

"You must have first crack at best-sellers?" she said.

"Sometimes," I said.

"Well," she said, flapping her hands on her knees, "I'm sure we'll all have a good time together. Ron and I hope you and Brenda will double with us soon."

"Not tonight," I smiled. "Soon. Will you excuse me?"

"Good night. I like Brenda *very* much."

"Thank you," I said as I started up the stairs.

I knocked gently on Brenda's door.

"I'm sleeping."

"Can I come in?" I asked.

Her door opened an inch and she said, "Ron will be up soon."

"We'll leave the door open. I only want to talk."

She let me in and I sat in the chair that faced her bed.

"How do you like your sister-in-law?"

"I've met her before."

"Brenda, you don't have to sound so damn terse."

She didn't answer and I just sat there yanking the string on the shade up and down.

"Are you still angry?" I asked at last.

"Yes."

"Don't be," I said. "You can forget about my suggestion. It's not worth it if this is what's going to happen."

"What did you expect to happen?"

"Nothing. I didn't think it would be so horrendous."

"That's because you can't understand my side."

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"Perhaps."

"No perhaps about it."

"*Okay*," I said. "I just wish you'd realize what it is you're getting angry about. It's not my suggestion, Brenda."

"No? What is it?"

"It's me."

"Don't start that again, will you? I can't win, no matter what I say."

"Yes, you can," I said. "You have."

I walked out of her room, closing the door behind me for the night.

When I got downstairs the following morning there was a great deal of activity. In the living room I heard Mrs. Patimkin reading a list to Harriet, and Julie was running in and out of rooms in search of a skate key. Carlota was vacuuming the carpet; every appliance in the kitchen was bubbling, twisting and shaking. Brenda greeted me with a perfectly pleasant smile and in the dining room, where I walked to look out at the back lawn and the weather, she kissed me on the shoulder.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello."

"I have to go with Harriet this morning," Brenda told me, "so we can't run. Unless you want to go alone."

"No. I'll read or something. Where are you going?"

"We're going to New York. Shopping. She's going to buy a wedding dress. For after the wedding. To go away in."

"What are *you* going to buy?"

"A dress to be maid of honor in. If I go with Harriet then I can go to Bergdorf's without all that Ohrbach's business with my mother."

"Get me something, will you?" I said.

"Neil, are you going to bring that up again!"

"I was only *fooling*. I wasn't even thinking about that."

"Then why did you say it?"

"Oh Jesus!" I said, and went outside and drove my car down into Millburn Center where I had some eggs and coffee.

When I came back, Brenda was gone, and there was only

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Carlota, Mrs. Patimkin, and myself in the house. I tried to stay out of whichever rooms they were in, but finally Mrs. Patimkin and I wound up sitting opposite each other in the TV room. She was checking off names on a long sheet of paper she held; next to her, on the table, were two thin phone books which she consulted from time to time.

"No rest for the weary," she said to me.

I smiled hugely, embracing the proverb as though Mrs. Patimkin had just then coined it. "Yes. Of course," I said. "Would you like some help? Maybe I could help you check something."

"Oh, no," she said with a little head-shaking dismissal, "it's for Hadassah."

"Oh," I said.

I sat and watched her until she asked, "Is your mother in Hadassah?"

"I don't know if she is now. She was in Newark."

"Was she an active member?"

"I guess so, she was always planting trees in Israel for someone."

"Really?" Mrs. Patimkin said. "What's her name?"

"Esther Klugman. She's in Arizona now. Do they have Hadassah there?"

"Wherever there are Jewish women."

"Then I guess she is. She's with my father. They went there for their asthma. I'm staying with my aunt in Newark. She's not in Hadassah. My Aunt Sylvia is, though. Do you know her, Aaron Klugman and Sylvia? They belong to your club. They have a daughter, my cousin Doris—" I couldn't stop myself "—They live in Livingston. Maybe it isn't Hadassah my Aunt Sylvia belongs to. I think it's some TB organization. Or cancer. Muscular dystrophy, maybe. I know she's interested in *some* disease."

"That's very nice," Mrs. Patimkin said.

"Oh yes."

"They do very good work."

"I know."

Mrs. Patimkin, I thought, had begun to warm to me; she

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let the purple eyes stop peering and just look out at the world for a while without judging. "Are you interested in B'nai Brith?" she asked me. "Ron is joining, you know, as soon as he gets married."

"I think I'll wait till then," I said.

Petulantly, Mrs. Patimkin went back to her lists, and I realized it'd been foolish of me to risk light-heartedness with her about Jewish affairs. "You're active in the Temple aren't you?" I asked, with all the interest I could muster.

"Yes," she said.

"What Temple do *you* belong to?" she asked in a moment.

"We used to belong to Hudson Street Synagogue. Since my parents left, I haven't had much contact,"

I didn't know whether Mrs. Patimkin caught a false tone in my voice. Personally, I thought I had managed my rueful confession pretty well, especially when I recalled the decade of paganism *prior* to my parents departure. Regardless, Mrs. Patimkin said immediately, and strategically it seemed, "We are all going to Temple Friday night. Why don't you come with us? Are you orthodox or conservative?"

I considered. "Well, I haven't gone in a long time... I sort of switch..." I smiled. "I'm just Jewish," I said well-meaningly, but that too sent Mrs. Patimkin back to her Hadassah work. Desperately I tried to think of something that would convince her I wasn't an infidel. Finally I asked:

"Do you know Martin Buber's work?"

"Buber... Buber," she said, looking at her Hadassah list. "Is he orthodox or conservative?" she asked.

"...He's a philosopher."

"Is he *reformed?*" she asked, piqued either at my evasiveness or at the possibility that Buber attended Friday night services without a hat, and Mrs. Buber had only one set of dishes in her kitchen.

"Orthodox," I said faintly.

"That's very nice," she said.

"Yes."

"Isn't Hudson Street Synagogue orthodox?" she asked.

"I don't know."

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"I thought you belonged."

"I was Bar Mitzvahed there."

"And you don't know that it's orthodox?"

"Yes. I do. It is."

"Then *you* must be."

"Oh, yes, I am," I said. "What are you?" I popped, flushing.

"Orthodox. My husband is conservative," which meant, I took it, that he didn't care. "Brenda is nothing, as you probably know."

"Oh?" I said. "No, I didn't know that."

"She was the best Hebrew student I've ever seen." Mrs. Patimkin said, "but then, of course, she got too big for her britches."

Mrs. Patimkin looked at me, and I wondered whether courtesy demanded that I agree. "Oh, I don't know," I said at last, "I'd say Brenda is conservative. Maybe a little reformed..."

The phone rang, rescuing me, and I spoke a silent orthodox prayer to the Lord.

"Hello," Mrs. Patimkin said. "...no...I can *not*, I have all the Hadassah calls to make..."

I acted as though I were listening to the birds outside, though the closed windows let no natural noises in.

"Have Ronald drive them up... But we can't wait, not if we want it on time..."

Mrs. Patimkin glanced up at me; then she put one hand over the mouth-piece. "Would you ride down to Newark for me?"

I stood. "Yes. Surely."

"Dear?" she said back into the phone, "Neil will come for it... No, *Neil*, Brenda's friend... Yes... Goodbye."

"Mr. Patimkin has some silver patterns I have to see. Would you drive down to his place and pick them up?"

"Of course."

"Do you know where the shop is?"

"Yes."

"Here," she said, handing a key ring to me, "take the Volkswagen."

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"My car is right outside."
"Take these," she said.

Patimkin Kitchen and Bathroom Sinks was in the heart of the Negro section of Newark. Years ago, at the time of the great immigration, it had been the Jewish section, and still one could see the little fish stores, the kosher delicatessens, the Turkish baths, where my grandparents had shopped and bathed at the beginning of the century. Even the smells had lingered: white fish, corned beef, sour tomatoes—but now, on top of these, was the grander greasier smell of auto wrecking shops, the sour stink of a brewery, the burning odor from a leather factory; and on the streets, instead of Yiddish, one heard the shouts of Negro children playing at Willie Mays with a broom handle and half a rubber ball. The neighborhood had changed: the old Jews like my grandparents had struggled and died, and their offspring had struggled and prospered, and moved further and further west, towards the edge of Newark, then out of it, and up the slope of the Orange Mountains, until they had reached the crest and started down the other side, pouring into Gentile territory as the Scotch-Irish had poured through the Cumberland Gap. Now, in fact, the Negroes were making the same migration, following the steps of the Jews, and those who remained in the Third Ward lived the most squalid of lives and dreamed in their fetid mattresses of the piney smell of Georgia nights.

I wondered, for an instant only, if I would see the colored kid from the library on the streets here. I didn't, of course, though I was sure he lived in one of the scabby, peeling buildings out of which dogs, children, and aproned women moved continually. On the top floors, windows were open, and the very old, who could no longer creak down the long stairs to the street, sat where they had been put, in the screenless windows, their elbows resting on fluffless pillows, and their heads tipping forward on their necks, watching the push of the young and the pregnant and the unemployed.

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Who would come after the Negroes? Who was left? No one, I thought, and someday these streets, where my grandmother had drunk hot tea from an old *jahrzeit* glass, would be empty and we would all of us have moved to the crest of the Orange Mountains, and wouldn't the dead stop kicking at the slats in their coffins then?

I pulled the Volkswagen up in front of a huge garage door that said across the front of it:

PATIMKIN KITCHEN AND BATHROOM SINKS
"Any Size—Any Shape"

Inside I could see a glass-enclosed office; it was in the center of an immense warehouse. Two trucks were being loaded in the rear, and Mr. Patimkin, when I saw him, had a cigar in his mouth and was shouting at someone. It was Ron, who was wearing a white T-shirt that said, "Ohio State Athletic Association," across the front. Though he was taller than Mr. Patimkin, and almost as stout, his hands hung weakly at his sides like a small boy's; Mr. Patimkin's cigar locomoted in his mouth. Six Negroes were loading one of the trucks feverishly, tossing—my stomach dropped!—sink bowls at one another.

Ron left Mr. Patimkin's side and went back to directing the men. He thrashed his arms about a good deal, and though on the whole he seemed rather confused, he didn't appear to be at all concerned about anybody dropping a sink. Suddenly I could see myself directing the Negroes—I would have an ulcer in an hour. I could almost hear the enamel surfaces shattering on the floor. And I could hear myself. "Watch it, you guys. Be careful, will you? *Whoops!* Oh, please be—*watch* it! Watch! Oh!" Suppose Mr. Patimkin should come up to me and say, "Okay, boy, you want to marry my daughter, let's see what you can do." Well, he would see: in a moment that floor would be a shattered mosaic, a crunchy path of enamel. "Klugman, what kind of worker are you? You work like you eat!" "That's right, that's right, I'm a sparrow, let me go." "Don't you even know how to load and unload?" "Mr. Patimkin, even breathing gives me trouble, sleep tires me out, let me go, let me go..."

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Mr. Patimkin was headed back to the fish bowl to answer a ringing phone, and I wrenched myself free of my reverie and headed towards the office too. When I entered Mr. Patimkin looked up from the phone with his eyes; the sticky cigar was in his free hand—he moved it at me, a greeting. From outside I heard Ron call in a high voice, "You can't all go to lunch at the same time. We haven't got all day!"

"Sit down," Mr. Patimkin shot at me, though when he went back to his conversation, I saw there was only one chair in the office, his. People did not sit at Patimkin Sink—here you earned your money the hard way, standing up. I busied myself looking at the several calendars that hung from filing cabinets; they showed illustrations of women so dreamy, so fantastically thighed and uddered, that one could not think of them as pornographic. The artist who had drawn the calendar girls for "Lewis Construction Company," and "Earl's Truck and Auto Repair," and "Grossman and Son, Paper Box," had been painting some third sex I had never seen.

"Sure, sure, sure," Mr. Patimkin said into the phone. "Tomorrow, don't tell me tomorrow. Tomorrow the world could blow up."

At the other end someone spoke. Who was it? Lewis from the construction company? Earl from truck repair?

"I'm running a business, Grossman, not a charity."

So it was Grossman being brow-beaten at the other end.

"Shit on that," Mr. Patimkin said, "you're not the only one in town, my good friend," and he winked at me.

Ah-ah, a conspiracy against Grossman. Me and Mr. Patimkin. I smiled, as collusively as I knew how.

"All right then, we're here till five... No later."

He wrote something on a piece of paper. It was only a big X.

"My kid'll be here," he said. "Yea, he's in the business."

Whatever Grossman said in the other end, it made Mr. Patimkin laugh. Mr. Patimkin hung up without a goodbye.

He looked out the back to see how Ron was doing. "Four years in college he can't unload a truck."

I didn't know what to say but finally chose the truth. "I guess I couldn't either."

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"You could learn. What am I, a genius? I learned. Hard work never killed anybody."

To that I agreed.

Mr. Patimkin looked at his cigar. "A man works hard he's got something. You don't get anywhere sitting on your behind, you know... The biggest men in the country worked hard, believe me. Even Rockefeller. Success don't come easy..." He did not say this so much as he mused it out while he surveyed his dominion. He was not a man enamored of words, and I had the feeling that what had tempted him into this barrage of universals, was probably the combination of Ron's performance and my presence—me, the outsider who might one day be an insider. But did Mr. Patimkin even consider that possibility? I did not know; I only knew that these few words he did speak could hardly transmit all the satisfaction and surprise he felt about the life he had managed to build for himself and his family.

He looked out at Ron again. "Look at him, if he played basketball like that they'd throw him the hell off the court." But he was smiling when he said it.

He walked over to the door. "Ronald, let them go to lunch."

Ron shouted back, "I thought I'd let some go now, and some later."

"Why?"

"Then somebody'll always be—"

"No fancy deals here," Mr. Patimkin shouted. "We all go to lunch at once."

Ron turned back. "All right, boys, lunch!"

His father smiled at me. "Smart boy? Huh?" He tapped his head. "That took brains, huh? He ain't got the stomach for business. He's an idealist," and then I think Mr. Patimkin suddenly realized who *I* was, and eagerly corrected himself so as not to offend. "That's all right, you know, if you're a school teacher, or like you, you know, a student or something like that. Here you need a little of the *gonif* in you. You know what that means? *Gonif?*"

"Thief," I said.

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"You know more than my own kids. They're *goyim*, my kids, that's how much they understand." He watched the Negro loading gang walk past the office and shouted out to them, "You guys know how long an hour is? All right, you'll be back in an hour!"

Ron came into the office and of course shook my hand.

"Do you have that stuff for Mrs. Patimkin?" I asked.

"Ronald, get him the silver patterns." Ron turned away and Mr. Patimkin said, "When I got married we had forks and knives from the five and ten. This kid needs gold to eat off," but there was no anger; far from it.

I drove to the mountains in my own car that afternoon, and stood for a while at the wire fence watching the deer lightly prance, coyly feed, under the protection of signs that read, "DO NOT FEED THE DEER, By Order of South Mountain Reservation." Alongside me at the fence were dozens of kids; they giggled and screamed when the deer licked the popcorn from their hands, and then were sad when their own excitement sent the young loping away towards the far end of the field where their tawny-skinned mothers stood regally watching the traffic curl up the mountain road. Young white-skinned mothers, hardly older than me, and in many instances, younger, chatted in their convertibles behind me, and looked down from time to time to see what their children were about. I had seen them before, when Brenda and I had gone out for a bite in the afternoon, or had driven up here for lunch: in clotches of three and four they sat in the rustic hamburger joints that dotted the Reservation area, while their children gobbled hamburgers and malteds and were given dimes to feed the jukebox. Though none of the little ones were old enough to read the song titles, almost all of them could holler out the words, and they did, while the mothers, a few of whom I recognized as high schoolmates of mine, compared suntans, supermarkets, and vacations. They looked immortal sitting there. Their hair would always stay the color they desired, their clothes the right texture and shade; in

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their homes they would have simple Swedish modern when that was fashionable, and if huge, ugly baroque ever came back, out would go the long, midget-legged marble coffee table and in would come Louis Quatorze. These were the goddesses, and if I were Paris I could not have been able to choose among them, so microscopic were the differences. Their fates had collapsed them into one. Only Brenda shined. Money and comfort would not erase her singleness—they hadn't yet, or had they? What was I loving, I wondered, and since I am not one to stick scalpels into myself, I wiggled my hand in the fence and allowed a tiny-nosed buck to lick my thoughts away.

When I returned to the Patimkin house, Brenda was in the living room looking more beautiful than I had ever seen her. She was modeling her new dress for Harriet and her mother. Even Mrs. Patimkin seemed softened by the sight. It was as though some sedative had been injected into her, and so relaxed the Brenda-hating muscles around her eyes and mouth.

Brenda, without her glasses, modeled in place. When she looked at me it was a kind of groggy, half-waking look I got, and though others might have interpreted it as sleepiness it sounded in my veins as lust. Mrs. Patimkin told her finally that she'd bought a very nice dress and I told her she looked lovely and Harriet told her she was very beautiful and that *she* ought to be the bride, and then there was an uncomfortable silence while all of us wondered who ought to be the groom.

Then when Mrs. Patimkin had led Harriet out to the kitchen, Brenda came up to me and said, "I *ought* to be the bride."

"You ought, sweetheart." I kissed her, and suddenly she was crying.

"What is it, honey?" I said.

"Let's go outside."

On the lawn, Brenda was no longer crying, but her voice sounded very tired.

"Neil, I called Margaret Sanger Clinic," she said. "When I was in New York."

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I didn't answer.

"Neil, they *did* ask if I were married. God, the woman sounded like my mother..."

"What did you say?"

"I said *no*."

"What did she say?"

"I don't know. I hung up." She walked away and around the oak tree. When she appeared again she'd stepped out of her shoes and held one hand on the tree, as though it were a May pole she were circling.

"You can call them back," I said.

She shook her head. "No, I can't. I don't even know why I called in the first place. We were shopping and I just walked away, looked up the number, and called."

"Then you can go to a doctor."

She shook again.

"Look, Bren," I said, rushing to her, "we'll go together, to a doctor. In New York—"

"I don't want to go to some dirty little office—"

"We won't. We'll go to the most posh gynecologist in New York. One who gets *Harper's Bazaar* for the reception room. How does that sound?"

She bit her lower lip.

"You'll come with me?" she asked.

"I'll come with you.'"

"To the office?"

"Sweetie, your husband wouldn't come to the office."

"No?"

"He'd be working."

"But you're not," she said.

"I'm on vacation," I said, but I had answered the wrong question. "Bren, I'll wait and when you're all done we'll buy a drink. We'll go out to dinner."

"Neil, I shouldn't have called Margaret Sanger—it's not right."

"It is, Brenda. It's the most right thing we can do." She walked away and I was exhausted from pleading. Somehow I felt I could have convinced her had I been a bit more crafty;

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and yet I did not want it to be craftiness that changed her mind. I was silent when she came back, and perhaps it was just that, my *not* saying anything, that prompted her finally to say, "I'll ask Mother Patimkin if she wants us to take Harriet too..."

VII

I shall never forget the heat and mugginess of that afternoon we drove into New York. It was four days after the day she'd called Margaret Sanger—she put it off and put it off, but finally on Friday, three days before Ron's wedding and four before her departure, we were heading through the Lincoln Tunnel, which seemed longer and fumier than ever, like Hell with tiled walls. Finally we were in New York and smothered again by the thick day. I pulled around the policeman who directed traffic in his shirt sleeves and up onto the Port Authority roof to park the car.

"Do you have cab fare?" I said.

"Aren't you going to come with me?"

"I thought I'd wait in the bar. Here, downstairs."

"You can wait in Central Park. His office is right across the street."

"Bren, what's the diff—" But when I saw the look that invaded her eyes I gave up the air-conditioned bar to accompany her across the city. There was a sudden shower while our cab went crosstown, and when the rain stopped the streets were sticky and shiny, and below the pavement was the rumble of the subways, and in all it was like entering the ear of a lion.

The doctor's office was in the Squibb Building, which is across from Bergdorf Goodman's and so was a perfect place for Brenda to add to her wardrobe. For some reason we had never once considered her going to a doctor in Newark, perhaps because it was too close to home and might allow for possibilities of discovery. When Brenda got to the revolving door she looked back at me; her eyes were very watery, even

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with her glasses, and I did not say a word, afraid what a word, any word, might do. I kissed her hair and motioned that I would be across the street by the Plaza fountain, and then I watched her revolve through the doors. Out on the street the traffic moved slowly as though the humidity were a wall holding everything back. Even the fountain seemed to be bubbling boiling water on the people who sat at its edge, and in an instant I decided against crossing the street, and turned south on Fifth and began to walk the steaming pavement towards St. Patrick's. On the north steps a crowd was gathered; everyone was watching a model being photographed. She was wearing a lemon-colored dress and had her feet pointed like a ballerina, and as I passed into the church I heard some lady say, "If I ate cottage cheese *ten* times a day, I couldn't be that skinny."

It wasn't much cooler inside the church, though the stillness and the flicker of the candles made me think it was. I took a seat at the rear and while I couldn't bring myself to kneel, I did lean forward onto the back of the bench before me and held my hands together and closed my eyes. I wondered if I looked like a Catholic, and in my wonderment I began to make a little speech to myself. Can I call the self-conscious words I spoke prayer? At any rate, I called my audience God. God, I said, I am 23 years old. I want to make the best of things. Now the doctor is about to wed Brenda to me, and I am not entirely certain this is all for the best. What is it I love, Lord? Why have I chosen? Who is Brenda? The race is to the swift. Should I have stopped to think?

I was getting no answers, but I went on. If we meet You at all, God, it's that we're carnal, and acquisitive, and thereby partake of You. I am carnal, and I know you approve, I just know it. But how carnal can I get? I am acquisitive. Where do I turn now in my acquisitiveness? Where do we meet? Which prize is You?

It was an ingenious meditation, and suddenly I felt ashamed. I got up and walked outside, and the noise of Fifth Avenue met me with an answer:

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Which prize do you think, *schmuck?* Gold dinnerware, sporting good trees, nectarines, garbage disposals, bumpless noses, Patimkin Sink, Bonwit Teller—

But damn it, God, that *is* You!

And God only laughed, that clown.

On the steps around the fountain I sat in a small arc of a rainbow that the sun had shot through the spray of the water. And then I saw Brenda coming out of the Squibb Building. She carried nothing with her, like a woman who's only been window shopping, and for a moment I was glad that in the end she had disobeyed my desire.

As she crossed the street, though, that little levity passed, and then I was myself again.

She walked up before me and looked down at where I sat; when she inhaled she filled her entire body, and then let her breath out with a "Whew!"

"Where is it?" I said.

My answer, at first, was merely that victorious look of hers, the one she'd given Simp the night she'd beaten her, the one I'd gotten the morning I finished the third lap alone. At last she said, "I'm wearing it."

"Oh, Bren."

"He said shall I wrap it or will you take it with you?"

"Oh Brenda, I love you."

We slept together that night, and so nervous were we about our new toy that we performed like kindergartners, or (in the language of that country) like a lousy double play combination. And then the next day we hardly saw one another at all, for with the last minute wedding preparations came scurrying, telegraming, shouting, crying, rushing—in short, lunacy. Even the meals lost their Patimkin fullness, and were tortured out of Kraft cheese, stale onion rolls, dry salami, a little chopped liver, and fruit cocktail. It was hectic all weekend, and I tried as best I could to keep clear of the storm, at whose eye, Ron, clumsy and smiling, and Harriet, flittering and courteous, were being pulled closer and closer together.

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By Sunday night fatigue had arrested hysteria and all of the Patimkins, Brenda included, had gone off to an early sleep. When Ron went into the bathroom to brush his teeth I decided to go in and brush mine. While I stood over the sink he checked his supports for dampness; then he hung them on the shower knobs and asked me I if would like to listen to his records for a while. It was not out of boredom and loneliness that I accepted; rather a brief spark of locker-room comradery had been struck there among the soap and the water and the tile, and I thought that perhaps Ron's invitation was prompted by a desire to spend his last moments as a Single Man with another Single Man. If I was right, then it was the first real attestation he'd given to my masculinity. How could I refuse?

I sat on the unused twin bed.

"You want to hear Mantovani?"

"Sure," I said.

"Who do you like better, him or Kostelanetz?"

"It's a toss up."

Ron went to his cabinet. "How about the Columbus record? Brenda ever play it for you?"

"No. I don't think so."

He extracted a record from its case, and like a giant with a sea shell, placed it gingerly on the phonograph. Then he smiled at me and leaned back onto his bed. His arms were behind his head and his eyes fixed on the ceiling. "They give this to all the seniors. With the yearbook—" but he hushed as soon as the sound began. I watched Ron and listened to the record.

At first there was just a roll of drums, the silence, then another drum roll—and then softly, a marching song, the melody of which was very familiar. When the song ended, I heard the bells—soft, loud, then soft again. And finally there came a voice, bowel-deep and historic, the kind one associates with documentaries about the rise of Fascism.

"The year, 1956. The season, Fall. The place, Ohio State University..."

Blitzkrieg! Judgment Day! The Lord had lowered his

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baton, and the Ohio State Glee Club was lining out the Alma Mater as if their souls depended on it. After one desperate chorus, they fell, still screaming, into bottomless oblivion, and the Voice resumed.

"The leaves have begun to turn and redden on the trees. Smoky fires line Fraternity Row, as pledges rake the leaves and turn them to a misty haze. Old faces greet new ones, new faces meet old, and another year had begun..."

Music. Glee Club in great comeback. Then the Voice. "The place, the banks of the Olentangy. The event, Homecoming Game, 1957. The opponent, the ever dangerous Illini..."

Roar of crowd. New voice: Bill Stern. "Illini over the ball. The snap. Linday fading to pass, he finds a receiver, he passes long *long* down field—and IT'S INTERCEPTED BY NUMBER 43, HERB CLARK OF OHIO STATE! Clark evades one tackler, he evades another as he comes up to midfield. Now he's picking up blockers, he's down to the 45, the 40, the 35—"

And as Bill Stern egged on Clark, and Clark Bill Stern, Ron, on his bed, with just a little body-english, eased Herb Clark over the goal.

"And it's Buckeyes ahead now, 21 to 19. What a game!"

The crowd subsided and the narrator baritoned in again. "But the season was up and down, and by the time the first snow had covered the turf, it was the sound of dribbling and the cry *Up and In!* that echoed through the fieldhouse..."

Ron closed his eyes.

"The Minnesota game," a new, high voice announced, "and for some of our seniors, their last game for the red and white... The players are ready to come out on the floor and into the spotlight. There'll be a big hand of appreciation from this capacity crowd for some of the boys who won't be back next year. Here comes Larry Gardner, big Number 7, out onto the floor. Big Larry from Akron, Ohio..."

"Larry—" announced the P.A. system; "Larry" the crowd roared back.

"And here comes Ron Patimkin dribbling out. Ron, Num-

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ber 11, from Short Hills, New Jersey. Big Ron's last game, and it'll be some time before Buckeye fans forget him..."

Big Ron tightened on his bed as the loud speaker called his name; his ovation must have set the nets to trembling. The rest of the players were announced, and then basketball season was over, and it was Religious Emphasis Week, the Senior Prom (Billy May blaring at the gymnasium roof), Fraternity Skit Night, E. E. Cummings reading to students (verse, silence, applause), and then, finally, commencement:

"The campus is hushed this day of days. For several thousand young men and women it is a joyous yet a solemn occasion. And for their parents a day of laughter and a day of tears. It is a bright green day, it is June the seventh of the year one thousand nine hundred and fifty seven and for these young Americans, the most stirring day of their lives. For many this will be their last glimpse of the campus, of Columbus, for many many years. Life calls us, and anxiously if not nervously we walk out into the world and away from the pleasures of these ivied walls. But not from its memories. They will be the concomitant, if not the fundament, of our lives. We shall choose husbands and wives, we shall choose jobs and homes, we shall sire children and grandchildren, but we will not forget you, Ohio State. In the years ahead we will carry with us always memories of thee, Ohio State..."

Slowly, softly, the O. S. U. Band begins the Alma Mater, and then the bells chime that last hour. Soft, very soft, for it is spring.

There was goose-flesh on Ron's veiny arms as the voice continued. "We offer ourselves to you then, world, and come at you in search of Life. And to you, Ohio State, to you Columbus, we say thank you, thank you and goodbye. We will miss you, in the fall, in the winter, in the spring, but some day we shall return. Till then, goodbye, Ohio State, goodbye, red and white, goodbye, Columbus... goodbye, Columbus... goodbye..."

Ron's eyes were closed. The Band was upending its last truckload of nostalgia, and I tiptoed from the room, in step with the 2163 members of the class of '57.

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I closed my door, but then opened it and looked back at Ron: he was still humming on his bed. Thee! I thought, my brother-in-law!

The wedding.

Let me begin with the relatives.

There was Mrs. Patimkin's side of the family: her sister Molly, a tiny buxom hen whose ankles swelled and ringed her shoes, and who would remember Ron's wedding if for no other reason than she'd martyred her feet in three inch heels, and Molly's husband, the butter and egg man, Harry Grossbart, who had earned his fortune with barley and corn in the days of Prohibition. Now he was active in the Temple and whenever he saw Brenda he swatted her on the can; it was a kind of physical bootlegging that passed, I guess, for familial affection. Then there was Mrs. Patimkin's brother, Marty Kreiger, the Kosher Hot Dog King, an immense man, as many stomachs as he had chins, and already, at 55, with as many heart-attacks as chins and stomachs combined. He had just come back from a health cure in the Catskills, where he said he'd eaten nothing but All-Bran and had won $1500 at gin rummy. When the photographer came by to take pictures, Marty put his hand on his wife's pancake breasts and said, "Hey, how about a picture of this!" His wife, Sylvia, was a frail, spindley woman with bones like a bird's. She had cried throughout the ceremony, and sobbed openly, in fact, when the rabbi had pronounced Ron and Harriet "man and wife in the eyes of God and the State of New Jersey;" later, at dinner, she had hardened enough to slap her husband's hand as it reached out for a cigar. However, when he reached across to hold her breast she just looked aghast and said nothing.

Also there were Mrs. Patimkin's twin sisters, Rose and Pearl, who both had white hair, the color of Lincoln convertibles, and nasal voices, and husbands who followed after them but talked only to each other, as though, in fact, sister had married sister, and husband had married husband. The

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husbands, named Earl Klein and Manny Kartzman, sat next to each other during the ceremony, then at dinner, and once, in fact, while the band was playing between courses, they rose, Klein and Kartzman, as though to dance, but instead walked to the far end of the hall where together they paced off the width of the floor. Earl, I learned later, was in the carpet business, and apparently he was trying to figure how much money he would make if the Hotel Pierre favored him with a sale.

On Mr. Patimkin's side there was only Leo, his half-brother. Leo was married to a woman named Bea whom nobody seemed to talk to. Bea kept hopping up and down during the meal and running over to the kiddie table to see if her little girl, Sharon, was being taken care of. "I told her not to take the kid. Get a baby-sitter, I said," Leo told me while Brenda danced with Ron's best man, Ferrari. "She says what are we, millionaires? No, for Christ sake, but my brother's kid gets married, I can have a little celebration. No, we gotta *shlep* the kid with us. Ach, it gives her something to do!..." He looked around the hall. Up on the stage Harry Winters (né Weinberg) was leading his band in a medley from *My Fair Lady;* on the floor, all ages, all sizes, all shapes were dancing. Mr. Patimkin was dancing with Julie, whose dress had slipped down from her shoulders to reveal her soft small back, and long neck, like Brenda's. He danced in little squares and was making considerable effort not to step on Julie's toes. Harriet, who was, as everyone said, a beautiful bride, was dancing with her father; Ron danced with Harriet's mother, Brenda with Ferrari, and I had sat down for a while in the empty chair beside Leo so as not to get manoeuvered into dancing with Mrs. Patimkin, which seemed to be the direction towards which things were moving.

"You're Brenda's boy-friend? Huh?" Leo said.

I nodded—earlier in the evening I'd stopped giving blushing explanations. "You gotta deal there, boy," Leo said, "you don't louse it up."

"She's very beautiful," I said. Leo poured himself a glass of champagne, and then waited as though he expected a head

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to form on it; when one didn't, he filled the glass to the brim.

"Beautiful, not beautiful, what's the difference. I'm a practical man. I'm on the bottom, so I gotta be. You're Aly Khan, you worry about marrying movie stars. I wasn't born yesterday... You know how old I was when I got married? Thirty-five years old. I don't know what the hell kind of hurry I was in. Whoo!" He drained his glass and refilled it. "I'll tell you something, one good thing happened to me in my whole life. Two maybe. Before I came back from overseas I got a letter from my wife—she wasn't my wife then. My mother-in-law found an apartment for us in Queens. Sixty-two fifty a month it cost. That's the last good thing that happened.'

"What was the first?"

"What first?"

"You said *two* things," I said.

"I don't remember. I say two because my wife tells me I'm sarcastic and a cynic. That way maybe she won't think I'm such a wise-guy."

I saw Brenda and Ferrari separate, and so excused myself and started for Brenda, but just then Mr. Patimkin separated from Julie and it looked as though the two men were going to switch partners. Instead the four of them stood on the dance floor and when I reached them they were laughing and Julie was saying, "What's so funny!" Ferrari said, "Hi," to me and whisked Julie away, which sent her into peels of laughter.

Mr. Patimkin had one hand on Brenda's back and suddenly the other one was on mine. "You kids having a good time?" he said.

We were sort of swaying, the three of us, to "*Get Me to the Church on Time.*"

Brenda kissed her father. "Yes," she said. "I'm so drunk my head doesn't even need my neck."

"It's a fine wedding, Mr. Patimkin."

"You want anything just ask me..." he said, a little drunken himself. "You're two good kids... How do you like

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that brother of yours getting married?... Huh?... Is that a girl or is that a girl?"

Brenda smiled, and though she apparently thought her father had spoken of her, I was sure he'd been referring to Harriet.

"You like weddings, Daddy?" Brenda said.

"I like my kids' weddings..." He slapped me on the back. "You two kids, you want anything? Go have a good time. Remember," he said to Brenda, "you're my honey..." Then he looked at me. "Whatever my Buck wants is good enough for me. There's no business too big it can't use another head."

I smiled, though not directly at him, and beyond I could see Leo sopping up champagne and watching the three of us. When he caught my eye he made a sign with his hand, a circle with his thumb and forefinger, indicating, "That a boy, that a boy!"

After Mr. Patimkin departed, Brenda and I danced closely, and we only sat down when the waiters began to circulate with the main course. The head table was noisy, particularly at our end where the men were almost all team-mates of Ron's, in one sport or another; they ate a fantastic number of rolls. Tank Feldman, Ron's room-mate, who had flown in from Toledo, kept sending the waiter back for rolls, for celery, for olives, and always to the squalling delight of Gloria Feldman, his wife, a nervous, undernourished girl who continually looked down the front of her gown as though there was some sort of construction project going on under her clothes. Gloria and Tank, in fact, seemed to be self-appointed precinct captains at our end. They proposed toasts, burst into wild song, and continually referred to Brenda and me as "love-birds." Brenda smiled at this with her eye teeth and I brought up a cheery look from some fraudulent auricle of my heart.

The night continued: we ate, we drank, we danced—Rose and Pearl did the Charleston with one another (while their husbands examined wood-work and chandeliers), and then I did the Charleston with none other than Gloria Feldman, who made coy, hideous faces at me all the time we danced. Near

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the end of the evening, Brenda, who'd been drinking champagne like her Uncle Leo, did a Rita Hayworth tango with herself, and Julie fell asleep on some ferns she'd whisked off the headtable and made into a mattress at the far end of the hall. I felt a numbness creep into my hard palate, and by three o'clock people were dancing in their coats, shoeless ladies were wrapping hunks of wedding cake in napkins for their children's lunch, and finally Gloria Feldman made her way over to our end of the table and said, freshly, "Well, our little Radcliffe smarty, what have *you* been doing all summer?"

"Growing a penis."

Gloria smiled and left as quickly as she'd come, and Brenda without another word, headed shakily away for the ladies' room and the rewards of over-indulgence. No sooner had she left, then Leo was beside me, a glass in one hand, a new bottle of champagne in the other.

"No sign of the bride and groom?" he said, leering. He'd lost most of his consonants by this time and was doing the best he could with long, wet vowels. "Well, you're next kid, I see it in the cards... You're nobody's sucker..." And he stabbed me in the side with the top of the bottle, spilling champagne on to the side of my rented tux. He straightened up, poured more onto his hand and glass, but then suddenly he stopped. He was looking into the lights which were hidden beneath a long bank of flowers that adorned the front of the table. He shook the bottle in his hand as though to make it fizz. "The son a of bitch who invented the fluorescent bulb should drop dead!" He set the bottle down and drank.

Up on the stage Harry Winters brought his musicians to a halt. The drummer stood up, stretched, and they all began to open up cases and put their instruments away. On the floor, relatives, friends, associates, were holding each other around the waists and the shoulders, and small children huddled around their parent's legs. A couple of kids ran in and out of the crowd, screaming at tag, until one was grabbed by an adult and slapped soundly on the behind. He began to cry, and couple by couple the floor emptied. Our table was a tangle of squashed everything: napkins, fruits, flowers; there

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were empty whiskey bottles, droopy ferns, and dishes puddled with unfinished cherry jubilee, gone sticky with the hours. At the end of the table Mr. Patimkin was sitting next to his wife, holding her hand. Opposite them, on two bridge chairs that had been pulled up, sat Mr. and Mrs. Ehrlich. They spoke quietly and evenly, as though they had known each other for years and years. Everything had slowed down now, and from time to time people would come up to the Patimkins and Ehrlichs, wish them *mazel tov*, and then drag themselves and their families out into the September night, which was cool and windy, someone said, and reminded me that soon would come winter and snow.

"They never wear out, those things, you know that." Leo was pointing to the fluorescent lights that shone through the flowers. "They last for years. They could make a car like that if they wanted, that could never wear out. It would run on water in the summer and snow in the winter. But they wouldn't do it, the big boys... Look at me," Leo said, splashing his suit front with champagne, "I sell a good bulb. You can't get the kind of bulb I sell in the drugstores. It's a quality bulb. But I'm the little guy. I don't even own a car. His brother, and I don't even own an automobile. I take a train wherever I go. I'm the only guy I know who wears out three pairs of rubbers every winter. Most guys get new ones when they lose the old ones. I wear them out, like shoes. Look," he said, leaning into me, "I could sell a crappy bulb, it wouldn't break my heart. But it's not good business."

The Ehrlichs and Patimkins scraped back their chairs and headed away, all except Mr. Patimkin who came down the table towards Leo and me.

He slapped Leo on the back. "Well, how you doing, *shtarke?*"

"All right, Ben. All right..."

"You have a good time?"

"You had a nice affair, Ben, it must've cost a pretty penny, Mr. Patimkin laughed. "When I make out my income tax I go to see Leo. He knows just how much money I spent... You need a ride home?" he asked me.

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"No, thanks. I'm waiting for Brenda. We have my car."

"Goodnight," Mr. Patimkin said.

I watched him step down off the platform that held the head table, and then start towards the exit. Now the only people in the hall—the shambles of a hall—were myself, Leo, and his wife and child who slept, both of them, with their heads pillowed in a crumpled tablecloth at a table down on the floor before us. Brenda still wasn't around.

"When you got it," Leo said, rubbing his fingers together, "you can afford to talk like a big shot. Who needs a guy like me anymore. Salesmen, you spit on them. You can go to the supermarket and buy anything. Where my wife shops you can buy sheets and pillowcases. Imagine, a grocery store! Me, I sell to gas stations, factories, small businesses, all up and down the East coast. Sure, you can sell a guy in a gas station a crappy bulb that'll burn out in a week. For inside the pumps I'm talking, it takes a certain kind of bulb. A utility bulb. All right, so you sell him a crappy bulb, and then a week later he puts in a new one, and while he's screwing it in he still remembers your name. Not me. I sell a quality bulb. It lasts a month, five weeks, before it even flickers, then it gives you another couple days, dim maybe, but so you shouldn't go blind. It hangs on, it's a quality bulb. Before it even burns out you notice it's getting darker, so you put a new one in. What people don't like is when one minute it's sunlight and the next dark. Let it glimmer a few days and they don't feel so bad. Nobody ever throws out my bulb—they figure they'll save them, can always use them in a pinch. Some times I say to a guy, you ever throw out a bulb you bought from Leo Patimkin? You gotta use psychology. That's why I'm sending my kid to college. You don't know a little psychology these days, you're licked..."

He lifted an arm and pointed out to his wife; then he slumped down in his seat. "Aaach!" he said, and drank off half a glass of champagne. "I'll tell you, go as far as New London, Connecticut. That's as far as I'll go, and when I come home at night I stop first for a couple drinks. Martinis. Two I have, sometimes three. That seems fair, don't it? But

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to her a little sip or a bathtubful, it smells the same. She says it's bad for the kid if I come home smelling. The kid's a baby, for God's sake, she thinks that's the way I'm *supposed* to smell. A forty eight year old man with a three year old kid! She'll give me a thrombosis that kid. My wife, she wants me to come home early and play with the kid before she goes to bed. Come home, she says, and *I'll* make you a drink. Hah! I spend all day sniffing gas, leaning under hoods with grimy *poilishehs* in New London, trying to force a lousy bulb into a socket—I'll screw it in myself, I tell them—and she thinks I want to come home and drink a martini from a jelly glass! How long are you going to stay in bars, she says. Till a Jewish girl is Miss Rheingold!

"Look," he went on after another drink, "I love my kid like Ben loves his Brenda. It's not that I don't want to play with her. But if I play with the kid and then at night get into bed with my wife, then she can't expect fancy things from me. It's one or the other. I'm no movie star."

Leo looked at his empty glass and put it on the table; he tilted the bottle up and drank the champagne like soda water. "How much do you think I make a week?" he said.

"I don't know."

"Take a guess."

"A hundred dollars."

"Sure, and tomorrow they're gonna let the lions out of the cage in Central Park. What do you think I make?"

"I can't tell."

"A cab driver makes more than me. That's a fact. My wife's brother is a cab driver, *he* lives in Kew Gardens. And he don't take no crap, no sir, not those cabbies. Last week it was raining one night and I said the hell with it, I'm taking a cab. I'd been all day in Newton, Mass. I don't usually go so far, but on the train in the morning I said to myself, stay on, go further, it'll be a change. And I know all the time I'm kidding myself, I wouldn't even come close to making up the extra fare it cost me. But I stay on. And at night I still had a couple boxes with me, so when the guy pulls up at Grand Central there's like a geni inside me says get in. I even threw

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bulbs in, not even caring if they broke. And this cabbie says, 'Whatya want to do, buddy, rip the leather? Those are brand new seats I got. No, I said. Jesus Christ, he says, some goddam people. I get in and give him a Queens address which ought to shut him up, but no, all the way up the Drive he was Jesus Christing me. It's hot in the cab, so I open a window and *then* he turns around and says, Whatya want to do, give me a cold in the neck? I just got over a goddam cold..." Leo looked at me, bleary-eyed. "This city is crazy! If I had a little money I'd get out of here in a minute. I'd go to California. They don't need bulbs out there it's so light. I went to New Guinea during the war from San Francisco. *There*," he burst, "there is the other good thing that happened to me, that night in San Francisco with this Hannah Schreiber. That's the both of them, you asked me I'm telling you—the apartment my mother-in-law got us, and this Hannah Schreiber. One night was all. I went to a B'nai Brith dance for servicemen in the basement of some big temple, and I met her. I wasn't married then, so don't make faces."

"I'm not."

"She had a nice little room, by herself. She was going to school to be a teacher. Already I knew something was up because she let me feel inside her slip in the cab. Listen to me, I sound like I'm always in cabs. Maybe two other times in my life. To tell the truth I don't even enjoy it. All the time I'm riding I'm watching the meter. Even the pleasures I can't enjoy!"

"What about Hannah Schreiber?"

He smiled, flashing some gold in his mouth. "How do you like that name? She was only a girl, but she had an old lady's name. In the room she says to me she believes in oral love. I can still hear her. 'Leo Patimkin, I believe in oral love.' I don't know what the hell she means. I figure she was one of those Christian Scientists or some cult or something. So I said, 'But what about for soldiers, guys going overseas who may get killed, Got forbid.!'" He shrugged his shoulders. "The smartest guy in the world I wasn't. But that's twenty years almost, I was still wet behind the ears. I'll tell you, every once

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in a while my wife—you know, she does for me what Hannah Schreiber did. I don't like to force her, she works hard. That to her is like a cab to me. I wouldn't force her. I can remember everytime, I'll bet. Once after a *Seder*, my mother was still living, she should rest on peace. My wife was up to here with Mogen David. In fact, *twice* after *Seders*. Aachhh! Everything good in my life I can count on my fingers! God forbid someone should leave me a million dollars, I wouldn't even have to take off my shoes. I got a whole other hand yet."

He pointed to the fluorescent bulbs with the nearly empty champagne bottle. "You call that a light? That's a light to *read* by? It's purple, for God's sake! Half the blind men in the world ruined themselves by those damn things. You know who's behind then? The optometrists! I'll tell you, if I could get a couple hundred for all my stock and the territory, I'd sell tomorrow. That's right, Leo A. Patimkin, one semester accounting City College nights, will sell equipment, territory, good name. I'll buy two inches in the *Times*. The territory is from here to everywhere. I go where I want, my own boss, no one tells me what to do. You know the Bible? 'Let there be light—and there's Leo Patimkin!' That's my trademark, I'll sell that too. I tell them that slogan, the *poilishehs*, they think I'm making it up. What good is it to be smart unless you're in on the ground floor! I got more brains in my pinky than Ben got in his whole *head*. Why is it he's on top and I'm on the bottom! *Why!* Believe me, if you're born lucky, you're lucky?" And then he exploded into silence.

I had the feeling that he was going to cry, so I leaned over and whispered to him, "You better go home." He agreed, but I had to raise him out of his seat and steer him by one arm down to his wife and child. The little girl could not be awakened, and Leo and Bea asked me to watch her while they went out into the lobby to get their coats. When they returned, Leo seemed to have dragged himself back to the level of human communication. He shook my hand with real feeling. I was very touched.

"You'll go far," he said to me. "You're a smart boy, you'll play it safe. Don't louse things up."

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"I won't."

"Next time we see you it'll be *your* wedding," and he winked at me. Bea stood alongside, muttering goodbye all the while he spoke. He shook my hand again and then picked the child out of her seat, and they turned towards the door. From the back, round-shouldered, burdened, child-carrying, they looked like people fleeing a captured city.

Brenda, I discovered, was asleep on a couch in the lobby. It was almost four o' clock and the two of us and the desk clerk were the only ones in the hotel lobby. At first I did not waken Brenda, for she was pale and wilted and I knew she had been sick. I sat beside her, smoothing her hair back off her ears. How would I ever come to know her, I wondered, for as she slept I felt I knew no more of her than what I could see in a photograph. I stirred her gently and in a half-sleep she walked beside me out to the car.

It was almost dawn when we came out of the Jersey side of the Lincoln Tunnel. I switched down to my parking lights, and drove on to the Turnpike, and there out before me I could see the swampy meadows that spread for miles and miles, watery, blotchy, smelly, like an oversight of God. I thought of that other oversight, Leo Patimkin, half-brother to Ben. In a few hours he would be on a train heading north, and as he passed Scarsdale and White Plains, he would belch and taste champagne and let the flavor linger in his mouth. Alongside him on the seat, like another passenger, would be cartons of bulbs. He would get off at New-London, or maybe, inspired by the sight of his half-brother, he would stay on again, hoping for some new luck further north. For the world was Leo's territory, every city, every swamp, every road and highway. He would go on to Newfoundland if he wanted, Hudson's Bay, and on up to Thule, and then slide down the other side of the globe and rap on frosted windows on the Russian steppes, if he wanted. But he wouldn't. Leo was forty-eight years old and he had learned. He pursued discomfort and sorrow, all right, but if you had a heartful by the time you reached New London, what new awfulness could you look forward to in Vladivostok?

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The next day the wind was blowing the fall in and the branches of the weeping willow were fingering at the Patimkin front lawn. I drove Brenda to the train at noon, and she left me.

VIII

AUTUMN came quickly. It was cold and in Jersey the leaves turned and fell overnight. The following Saturday I took a ride up to see the deer, and did not even get out of the car, for it was too brisk to be standing at the wire fence, and so I watched the animals walk and run in the dimness of the late afternoon, and after a while everything, even the objects of nature, the trees, the clouds, the grass, the weeds, reminded me of Brenda, and I drove back down to Newark. Already we had sent our first letters and I had called her late one night, but in the mail and on the phone we had some difficulty discovering one another; we had not the style yet. That night I tried her again, and someone on her floor said she was out and would not be in till late.

Upon my return to the library I was questioned by Mr. Scapello about the Gauguin book. The jowly gentleman *had* sent a nasty letter about my discourtesy, and I was only able to extricate myself by offering a confused story in an indignant tone. In fact, I even managed to turn it around so that Mr. Scapello was apologizing to me as he led me up to my new post, there among the encyclopedias, the bibliographies, the indexes and guides. My bullying surprised me, and I wondered if some of it had not been learned from Mr. Patimkin that morning I'd heard him giving Grossman an earful on the phone. Perhaps I was more of a businessman than I thought. Maybe I could learn to become a Patimkin with ease...

Days passed slowly; I never did see the colored kid again, and when, one noon, I looked in the stacks, Gauguin was gone, apparently charged out finally by the jowly man. I wondered what it had been like that day the colored kid had

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discovered the book was gone. Had he cried? For some reason I imagined that he had blamed it on me, but then I realised that I was confusing the dream I'd had with reality. Chances were he had discovered someone else, Van Gogh, Vermeer... But no, they were not his kind of artists. What had probably happened was that he'd given up on the library and gone back to playing Willie Mays in the streets. He was better off, I thought. No sense carrying dreams of Tahiti in your head, if you can't afford the fare.

Let's see, what else did I do? I ate, I slept, I went to the movies, I sent broken-spined books to the bindery—I did everything I'd ever done before, but now each activity was surrounded by a fence, existed alone, and my life consisted of jumping from one fence to the next. There was no flow, for that had been Brenda.

And then Brenda wrote saying that she would be coming in for the Jewish holidays which were only a week away. I was so overjoyed I wanted to call Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin, just to tell them of my pleasure. However, when I got to the phone and had actually dialled the first two letters, I knew that at the other end there would be silence; if there was anything said, it would only be Mrs. Patimkin asking, "What is it you want?" Mr. Patimkin had probably forgotten my name.

That night, after dinner, I gave Aunt Gladys a kiss and told her she shouldn't work so hard.

"In less than a week it's Rosh Hashana and he thinks I should take a vacation. Ten people I'm having. What do you think, a chicken cleans itself? Thank God, the holidays come once a year, I'd be an old woman before my time."

But then it was only nine people Aunt Gladys was having, for only two days after her letter, Brenda called.

"Oy, Gut!" Aunt Gladys called. "Long *distance!*"

"Hello?" I said.

"Hello, sweetie?"

"Yes," I said.

"What *is* it?" Aunt Gladys tugged at my shirt. "What is it?"

"It's for me."

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"*Who?*" Aunt Gladys said, pointing into the receiver.

"Brenda," I said.

"Yes?" Brenda said.

"Brenda?" Aunt Gladys said. "What does she call long distance, I almost had a heart attack."

"Because she's in Boston," I said, "Please Aunt Gladys..."

And Aunt Gladys walked off, mumbling, "These kids..."

"Hello," I said again into the phone.

"Neil, how are you?"

"I love you."

"Neil, I have bad news. I can't come in this week."

"But, honey, it's the Jewish holidays."

"Sweet*heart*," she laughed.

"Can't you say that, for an excuse?"

"I have a test Saturday, and a paper, and you know if I went home I wouldn't get anything done..."

"You would."

"Neil, I just *can't*. My mother'd make me go to Temple, and I wouldn't even have enough time to see *you*."

"Oh God, Brenda."

"Sweetie?"

"Yes?"

"Can't you come up here?" she asked.

"I'm working."

"The Jewish holidays," she said.

"Honey, I can't. Last year I didn't take them off. I can't all—"

"You can say you had a conversion."

"Besides, my aunt's having all the family for dinner, and you know what with my parents—"

"Come up, Neil."

"I can't just take two days off, Bren. I just got promoted and a raise—"

"The hell with the raise."

"Baby, it's my job."

"Forever?" she said.

"No."

"Then come. I've got a hotel room."

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"For me?"
"For us. The Commander."
"Can you do that?"
"No and yes. People do it."
"Brenda, you tempt me."
"Be tempted."
"I could take a train Wednesday right from work."
"You could stay till Sunday night."
"Bren, I can't. I still have to be back to work on Saturday."
"Don't you ever get a day *off?*" she said.
"Tuesday," I said glumly.
"God."
"And Sunday," I added.
Brenda said something but I did not hear her for Aunt Gladys called, "You talk all day long distance?"
"Quiet!" I shouted back to her.
"Neil, will you?"
"Damn it, yes," I said.
"Are you angry?"
"I don't think so. I'm going to come up."
"Till Sunday."
"We'll see."
"Don't feel upset, Neil. You sound upset. It is the Jewish holidays. I mean you *should* be off."
"That's right," I said. "I'm an orthodox Jew, for God's sake, I ought to take advantage of it."
"That's right," she said.
"Is there a train around six?"
"Every hour, I think."
"Then I'll be on the one that leaves at six."
"I'll be at the station," she said. "How will I know you?"
"I'll be disguised as an orthodox Jew."
"Me too," she said.
"Good night, love," I said.

Aunt Gladys cried when I told her I was going away for Rosh Hashana.

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"And I was preparing a big meal," she said.

"You can still prepare it."

"What will I tell your mother?"

"I'll tell her, Aunt Gladys. Please. You have no right to get upset..."

"Someday you'll have a family you'll know what it's like."

"I have a family now."

"What's a matter," she said, blowing her nose, "that girl couldn't come home to see her family it's the holidays?"

"She's in school, she just can't—"

"If she loved her family she'd find time. We don't live six hundred years."

"She does love her family."

"Then one day a year you could break your heart and pay a visit."

"Aunt Gladys, you don't understand."

"Sure," she said, "when I'm 23 years old I'll understand everything."

I went to kiss her and she said, "Go way from me, go run to Boston..."

The next morning I discovered that Mr. Scapello didn't want me to leave on Rosh Hashana either, but I unnerved him, I think, by hinting that his coldness about my taking the two days off might just be so much veiled anti-semitism, so on the whole he was easier to manage. At lunch time I took a walk down to Penn Station and picked up a train schedule to Boston. That was my bedtime reading for the next three nights.

She did not look like Brenda, at least for the first minute. And probably to her I did not look like me. But we kissed and held each other, and it was strange to feel the thickness of our coats between us.

"I'm letting my hair grow," she said in the cab, and that in fact was all she said. Not until I helped her out of the cab did I notice the thin gold band shining on her left hand.

She hung back, strolling casually about the lobby while I signed the register "Mr. and Mrs. Neil Klugman," and then

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in the room we kissed again.

"Your heart's pounding," I said to her.

"I know," she said.

"Are you nervous?"

"No."

"Have you done this before?" I said.

"I read Mary MacCarthy."

She took off her coat and instead of putting it in the closet, she tossed it across the chair. I sat down on the bed; she didn't.

"What's the matter?"

Brenda took a deep breath and walked over to the window, and I thought that perhaps it would be best for me to ask nothing—for us to get used to each other's presence in quiet. I hung her coat and mine in the empty closet, and left the suitcases—mine and hers—standing by the bed.

Brenda was kneeling backwards in the chair, looking out the window as though out the window was where she'd rather be. I came up behind her and put my hands around her body and held her breasts, and when I felt the cool draft that swept under the sill, I realised how long it had been since that first warm night when I had put my arms around her and felt the tiny wings beating in her back. And then I realised why I'd really come to Boston—it had been long enough. It was time to stop kidding about marriage.

"Is something the matter?" I said.

"Yes."

It wasn't the answer I'd expected; I wanted no answer really, only to soothe her nervousness with my concern.

But I asked, "What is it? Why didn't you mention it on the phone?"

"It only happened today."

"School?"

"Home. They found out about us."

I turned her face up to mine. "That's okay. I told my aunt I was coming here too. What's the difference?"

"About the summer. About our sleeping together."

"Oh?"

"Yes."

"...Ron?"

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"No."

"That night, you mean, did Julie—"

"No," she said, "it wasn't any*body*."

"I don't get it."

Brenda got up and walked over to the bed where she sat down on the edge. I sat in the chair.

"My mother found the thing."

"The diaphragm?"

She nodded.

"When?" I asked.

"The other day, I guess." She walked to the bureau and opened her purse. "Here, you can read them in the order I got them." She tossed an envelope at me; it was dirty-edged and crumpled, as though it had been in and out of her pockets a good many times. "I got this one this morning," she said. "Special delivery."

I took out the letter and read:

PATIMKIN KITCHEN AND BATHROOM SINKS

"Any Size—Any Shape"

Dear Brenda—

Don't pay any Attention to your Mother's Letter when you get it. I love you honey if you want a coat I'll buy You a coat. You could always have anything you wanted. We have every faith in you so you won't be too upset by what your mother says in her Letter. Of course she is a little hysterical because of the shock and she has been Working so hard for Hadassah. She is a Woman and it is hard for her to understand some of the Shocks in life. Of course I can't say We weren't all surprised because from the beginning I was nice to him and thought he would appreciate the nice vacation we supplied for him. Some People never turn out the way you hope and pray but I am willing to forgive and call Buy Gones, Buy Gones. You have always up till now been a good Buck and got good scholastic Grades and Ron has always been what we wanted a Good Boy, most important, and a Nice boy. This late in my life believe me I am not going to start hating my own flesh and blood. As for your mistake it takes Two to make a mistake and now that you

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will be away at school and from him and what you got involved in you will probably do all right I have every faith you will. You have to have faith in your children like in a Business or any serious undertaking and there is nothing that is so bad that we can't forgive especially when Our own flesh and blood is involved. We have a nice close nitt family and why not???? Have a nice Holiday and in Temple I will say a Prayer for you as I do every year. On Monday I want you to go into Boston and buy a coat. Whatever you need because I know how Cold it gets up where you are... Give my regards to Linda and remember to bring her home with you on Thanksgiving like last year. You two had such a nice time. I have always never said bad things about any of your friends or Rons and that this should happen is only the exception that proves the rule. Have a Happy Holiday.

Your Father

And then it was signed *Ben Patimkin*, but that was crossed out and written beneath "Your Father" were again, like an echo, the words, "Your Father."

"Who's Linda?" I asked.

"My room-mate, last year." She tossed another envelope to me. "Here. I got this one in the afternoon. Air Mail."

The letter was from Brenda's mother. I started to read it and then put it down a moment. "You got this *after?*"

"Yes," she said. "When I got his I didn't know what was happening. Read hers."

I began again.

Dear Brenda:

I don't even know how to begin. I have been crying all morning and have had to skip my board meeting this afternoon because my eyes are so red. I never thought this would happen to a daughter of mine. I wonder if you know what I mean, if it is at least on your conscience, so I won't have to degrade either of us with a description. All I can say is that this morning when I was cleaning out the drawers and putting away your summer clothing I came upon something in your bottom drawer, *under* some sweaters which you probably

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remember leaving there. I cried the minute I saw it and I haven't stopped crying yet. Your father called a while ago and now he is driving home because he heard how upset I was on the phone.

I don't know what we ever did that you should reward us this way. We gave you a nice home and all the love and respect a child needs. I always was proud when you were a little girl that you could take care of yourself so well. You took care of Julie so beautifully it was a treat to see, when you were only fourteen years old. But you drifted away from your family, even though we sent you to the best schools and gave you the best money could buy. Why you should reward us this way is a question I'll carry with me to the grave.

About your friend I have no words. He is his parent's responsibility and I cannot imagine what kind of home life he had that he could act that way. Certainly that was a fine way to re-pay us for the hospitality we were nice enough to show to him, a perfect stranger. That the two of you should be carrying on like that in our very house I will never in my life be able to understand. Times certainly have changed since I was a girl that this kind of thing could go on. I keep asking myself if at least you didn't think of us while you were doing that. If not for me, how could you do this to your father? God forbid Julie should ever learn of this.

God only knows what you have been doing all these years we put our trust in you.

You have broken your parents' heart and you should know that. This is some thank you for all we gave you.

Mother

She only signed "Mother" once, and that was in an extraordinarily miniscule hand, like a whisper.

"Brenda," I said.

"What?"

"Are you starting to cry?"

"No. I cried already."

"Don't start again."

"I'm trying not to, for God's sake."

"Okay... Brenda, can I ask you one question?"

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"What?"

"Why did you leave it home?"

"Because I didn't plan on using it here, that's why."

"Suppose I'd come up. I mean I have come up, what about that?"

"I thought I'd come down first."

"So then couldn't you have carried it down then? Like a toothbrush?"

"Are you trying to be funny?"

"No. I'm just asking you why you left it home."

"I told you," Brenda said. "I thought I'd come home."

"But, Brenda, that doesn't make any sense. Suppose you did come home, and then you came back again. Wouldn't you have taken it with you then?"

"I don't *know*."

"Don't get angry," I said

"You're the one who's angry."

"I'm upset, I'm not angry."

"I'm upset then too."

I did not answer but walked to the window and looked out. The stars and moon were out, silver and hard, and from the window I could see over to the Harvard campus where lights burned and then seemed to flicker when the trees blew across them.

"Brenda..."

"What?"

"Knowing how your mother feels about you, wasn't it silly to leave it home? Risky?"

"What does how she feels about me have to do with it?"

"You can't trust her."

"Why can't I?"

"Don't you see. You *can't*"

"Neil, she was only cleaning out the drawers."

"Didn't you know she would?"

"She never did before. Or maybe she did. Neil, I couldn't think of everything. We slept together night after night and nobody heard or noticed—"

"Brenda, why the hell are you willfully confusing things?"

"I'm not!"

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"Okay," I said softly. "All right."

"It's you who's confusing things," Brenda said. "You act as though I wanted her to find it."

I didn't answer.

"Do you believe *that?*" she said, after neither of us had spoken for a full minute.

"I don't know."

"Oh, Neil, you're *crazy.*"

"What was crazier than leaving that damn thing around?"

"It was an oversight."

"Now it's an oversight, before it was deliberate."

"It was an oversight about the drawer. It wasn't an oversight about leaving it," she said.

"Brenda, sweetheart, wouldn't the safest, smartest, easiest, simplest thing been to have taken it with you? Wouldn't it?"

"It didn't make any difference either way."

"Brenda, this is the most frustrating argument of my life!"

"You keep making it seem as though I *wanted* her to find it. Do you think I need this? Do you? I can't even go home anymore."

"Is that so?"

"Yes!"

"No," I said. "You can go home; your father will be waiting with two coats and a half dozen dresses."

"What about my mother?"

"It'll be the same with her."

"Don't be absurd. How can I face them!"

"Why can't you face them? Did you do anything wrong?"

"Neil, look at the reality of the thing, will you?"

"*Did* you do anything wrong?"

"Neil, *they* think it's wrong. They're my parents."

"But do you think it's wrong—"

"That doesn't *matter.*"

"It does to me, Brenda..."

"Neil, why are *you* confusing things. You keep accusing me of things."

"Damn it, Brenda, you're guilty of some things."

"*What?*"

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"Of leaving that damn diaphragm there. How can you call it an oversight!"

"Oh, Neil, don't start any of that psycho-analytic crap!"

"Then why else did you do it? You wanted her to find it!"

"Why?"

"I don't know, Brenda, *why?*"

"Oh!" she said, and she picked up the pillow and threw it back on to the bed.

"What happens now, Bren?" I said.

"What does that mean?"

"Just that. What happens now?"

She rolled over on the bed and buried her head in it.

"Don't start crying," I said.

"I'm *not.*"

I was still holding the letters and took Mr. Patimkin's from its envelope.

"Why does your father capitalize all these letters?"

She didn't answer.

"'As for your mistake,'" I read aloud to Brenda, "'it takes Two to make a mistake and now that you will be away at school and from him and what you got involved in you will probably do all right I have every faith you will. Your father. Your father.'"

She turned and look at me; but silently.

"'I have always never said bad things about any of your friends or Rons and that this should happen is only the exception that proves the rule. Have a Happy Holiday.'" I stopped; in Brenda's face there was positively no threat of tears; she looked, suddenly, solid and decisive. "Well, what are you going to do?" I asked.

"Nothing."

"Who are you going to bring home Thanksgiving—Linda?" I said, "or me?"

"Who *can* I bring home, Neil?"

"I don't know, who can you?"

"Can I bring you home?"

"I don't know," I said, "can you?"

"Stop repeating the question!"

"I sure as hell can't give you the answer."

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"Neil, be realistic. After this, can I bring you home? Can you see us all sitting around the table?"

"I can't if you can't, and I can if you can."

"Are you going to speak Zen, for God's sake!"

"Brenda, the choices aren't mine. You can bring Linda or me. You can go home or not go home. That's another choice. Then you don't even have to worry about choosing between me and Linda."

"Neil, you don't understand. They're still my parents. They did send me to the best schools, didn't they? They have given me everything I've wanted, haven't they?"

"Yes."

"Then how can I not go home? I *have* to go home."

"Why?"

"You don't understand. Your parents don't bother you any more. You're lucky."

"Oh, sure. I live with my crazy aunt, that's a real bargain."

"Families are different. You don't understand."

"Goddamit, I understand more than you think. I understand why the hell you left that thing lying around. Don't you? Can't you put two and two together?"

"Neil, what are you talking about! You're the one who doesn't understand. You're the one who from the very beginning was accusing me of things? Remember? Isn't it so? Why don't you have your eyes fixed? Why don't you have this fixed? As if it were my fault that I *could* have them fixed. You kept acting as if I was going to run away from you every minute. And now you're doing it again, telling me I planted that thing on purpose."

"I loved you, Brenda, so I cared."

"I loved *you*. That's why I got that damn thing in the first place."

And then we heard the tense in which we'd spoken and we settled back into our selves and silence.

A few minutes later I picked up my bag and put on my coat. I think Brenda was crying too when I went out the door.

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Instead of grabbing a cab immediately, I walked down the street and out towards the Harvard campus which I had never seen before. I entered one of the gates and then headed out along a path, under the tired autumn foliage and the dark sky. I wanted to be alone, in the dark; not because I wanted to think about anything, but rather because, for just a while, I wanted to think about nothing. I walked clear across the campus and up a little hill and then I was standing in front of the Lamont Library, which, Brenda had once told me, had Patimkin Sinks in its Rest Rooms. From the light of the lamp on the path behind me I could see my reflection in the glass front of the building. Inside, it was dark and there were no students to be seen, no librarians. Suddenly, I wanted to set down my suitcase and pick up a rock and heave it right through the glass, but of course I didn't. I simply looked at myself in the mirror the light made of the window. I was only that substance, I thought, those limbs, that face that I saw in front of me. I looked, but the outside of me gave up little information about the inside of me. I wished I could scoot around to the other side of the window, faster than light or sound or Herb Clark on Homecoming Day, to get behind that image and catch whatever it was that looked through those eyes. What was it inside me that had turned pursuit and clutching into love, and then turned it inside out again? What was it that had turned winning into losing, and losing —who knows—into winning? I was sure I had loved Brenda, though standing there, I knew I couldn't any longer. And I knew it would be a long while before I made love to anyone the way I had made love to her. With anyone else, could I summon up such a passion? Whatever spawned my love for her, had that spawned such lust too? If she had only been slightly *not* Brenda... but then would I have loved her? I looked hard at the image of me, at that darkening of the glass, and then my gaze pushed through it, over the cool floor, to a broken wall of books, imperfectly shelved.

I did not look very much longer, but took a train that got me into Newark just as the sun was rising on the first day of the Jewish New Year. I was back in plenty of time for work.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Philip Roth *(Goodbye Columbus)* is already well known to readers of THE PARIS REVIEW for his stories, *The Conversion of the Jews* and *Epstein*, published in Nos. 18 and 19 respectively. His stories and articles have also been published by *Esquire*, *The Chicago Review*, *Commentary*, *Nation* and *The New Yorker*. A collection of his work will appear this spring from Houghton Mifflin. A former instructor of English at the University of Chicago, he is now married and living in New York City.

William Butler *(The Building)* was born in Portland, Oregon but now lives in California where he is director of Literature and Drama at KPFA radio station in Berkeley. One of his stories has appeared in *Discovery* and he is currently at work on a novel.

INTERVIEW

Nelson W. Aldrich Jr., *(Interview with James Jones)* is Paris Editor of THE PARIS REVIEW.

PORTFOLIOS

James Lord *(text on Chagall)* is the author of two novels, *No Traveller Returns*, and *Something of Success*. His short stories have appeared in *Horizon* and *Botteghe Oscure*. He lives in Paris.

Pierre Schneider *(text on Helion)* is a free-lance journalist who has made his home in Paris. The author of many articles in both French and English periodicals, he has also written a volume called, *Les Quatre Saisons*.

POETRY

Robert Bly *(The Sorb is the Tree of Thor)* has studied at the University of Iowa and at Harvard where he won the Lloyd Garrison Prize for Poetry in 1950. His verse appeared in our first two issues and in No. 16.

Edward Watkins *(Light Essay on a Serious Theme)* works for a lecture bureau in New York. He has published poems in the *Sewanee Review*, and stories in the *Atlantic* and *Story*.

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Stephen Orgel *(Talking it Out)* is studying for the doctorate at Harvard. While an undergraduate at Columbia he edited the *Columbia Review*. He has published two poems in THE PARIS REVIEW, No. 16, and one in No. 12.

E. G. Burrows *(Icon)* is the author of *The Arctic Fern* published by Evergreen Books. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Evergreen Review* and other periodicals.

Ralph Pomeroy *(A Frog Leaping)* is a young American poet living in England. His verse has appeared in British and American magazines, and his first book will shortly be published by the Hawk's Well Press in New York.

Peter Levi, S. J. *(In a Corner of Eden)* is an English Jesuit who teaches at Stoneyhurst College. His first book. *The Gravel Pond*, will be published this year by André Deutsch in England and by Macmillan in the United States.

James Wright *(Old Man Drunk)* was chosen Yale Younger Poet in 1957 with his book *The Green Wall*. A second collection of his verse, *The Lamentation of Saint Judas*, appeared last fall. He has been a frequent contributor to THE PARIS REVIEW.

Louis Simpson *(The Boarder)* has often been published in THE PARIS REVIEW. Two collections of his verse have already appeared under the titles. *The Arrivistes* and *Good News of Death*. A third volume, *A Desert With a Name*, was published this fall.

Richard M. Elman *(Arbor Day)* having held a Stanford Creative Writing Fellowship, is at present a member of the United States Army. He has previously been published in *Talisman* and THE PARIS REVIEW, No. 16.

Allen Grossman *(Holy Ghost Hospital)* is a graduate student at Brandeis University. A former editor of *The Harvard Advocate*, his poetry has appeared in *Poetry*, *Commentary*, and THE PARIS REVIEW, No. 19.

Thomas Whitbread *(Glutton)* did his undergraduate work at Amherst and is continuing his studies at Harvard.

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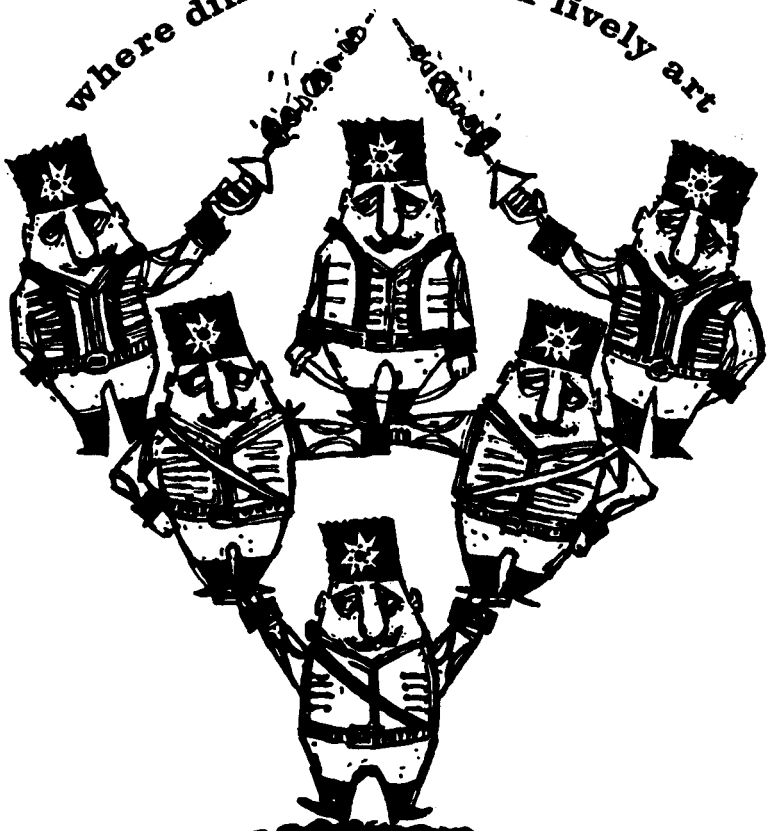

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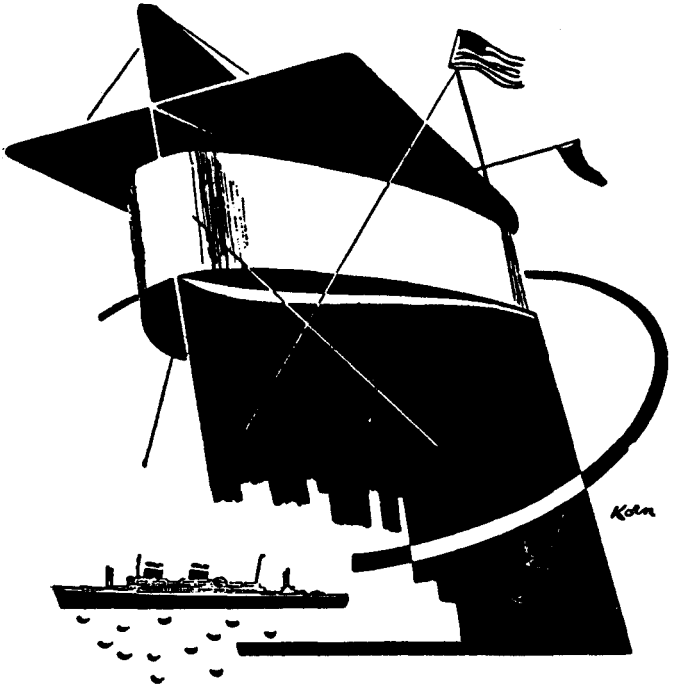

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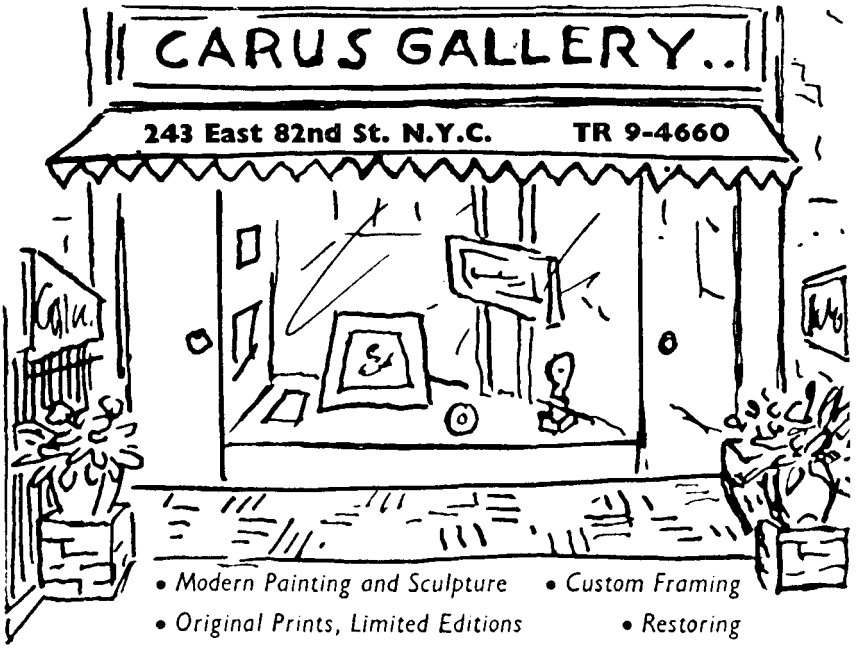

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